

FREE HAND ABROAD, DIVIDE AND RULE AT HOME:  
THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF UNIPOLARITY

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## FREE HAND ABROAD, DIVIDE AND RULE AT HOME<sup>1</sup>

Why did America invade Iraq? The glib answer is “because it could.” In the unipolar moment, the immediate costs and risks of using military force against Saddam Hussein’s hollow, troublesome regime seemed low to U.S. leaders.<sup>2</sup>

But this explanation begs the important questions. Disproportionate power allows greater freedom of action, but it is consistent with a broad spectrum of policies, ranging from messianic attempts to impose a new world order to smug insulation from the world’s quagmires. How this freedom is used depends on how threats and opportunities are interpreted through the prism of ideology and domestic politics. In this sense, unipolarity was a permissive cause of the Bush Administration’s preventive war doctrine and its application in Iraq. America’s unprecedented power combined with the motivation and opportunity presented by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack to permit the President to reframe the assumptions behind American global strategy.

The free hand in strategy is an enduring feature of American foreign policy. Unipolarity simply gave it unprecedented latitude. During the twentieth century, whether under multi-, bi- or unipolarity, America enjoyed the luxury of disproportionate power and geographical buffering, which allowed—even required—ideology to define America’s strategically underdetermined world role. This ideology was normally liberalism, sometimes that of the disengaged “city on a hill,” sometimes that of the crusading reformer.<sup>3</sup> Writing in the wake of the Vietnam War, Stephen Krasner worried that the more powerful the United States would become, the more this ideological leeway would express itself as imperialism: “Only states whose resources are very large, both absolutely and relatively, can engage in imperial policies, can attempt to impose their vision on other countries and the global system. And it is only here that ideology becomes a critical determinant of the objectives of foreign policy.”<sup>4</sup> And yet when unipolarity arrived in the 1990s, skittishness about costs and casualties severely constrained American liberal idealism abroad.

What changed in 2001 was not just the terrorist attack, but also the ideological and political environment that made the most of it. Three decades of increasing partisan ideological polarization on domestic issues culminated in the Bush Administration’s extending it into the realm of foreign policy. Even before September 11, the Bush Administration was well stocked with Republican hawks and neo-conservative ideologues who already had in their briefcases the blueprints to reframe American strategy. These ideological revolutionaries in foreign policy emerged as a result of the same underlying partisan incentives that had earlier polarized partisan stances on domestic policy. While the American public has remained centrist, less moderate activists in both parties have been able to exploit the primary system, money politics, and media message control to succeed by appealing mainly to their partisan bases. This process forced liberals out of the Republican party and conservatives out of the

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written for a collection on unipolarity edited by John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William Wohlforth. We thank Michael Desch, James Gibson, Ronald Krebs, and participants in a seminar at the LBJ School at the University of Texas for criticizing an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jervis, “The Compulsive Empire,” *Foreign Policy* No. 137 (July/August 2003), 82-87.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 340.

Democratic party, leaving both parties far more homogeneous ideologically than ever before, and less responsive to views of the median voter.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the parties seek to exploit “wedge” issues like tax cuts, health care, and traditional morality that serve their base’s agenda but can be framed to appeal to some voters with strong preferences on that issue in the opposing camp. National security was just such a wedge issue for the Republicans. It was never more effective than in the 2004 election, which President Bush won largely because he was more trusted to deal with terrorism. Three decades of polarization produced Republican survivors of partisan competition who hardly needed reminders from White House campaign orchestrator Karl Rove of the tactical advantages of framing issues in ways that both rally the base and put the Democrats off balance.<sup>6</sup> Natural selection under polarization—together with the permissive conditions of unipolarity and September 11—culminated in the distinctive Bush approach to the “war on terror.”

*How does unipolarity affect foreign policy ideas and choices?*

A logical and venerable proposition holds that states are more likely to succumb to the lure of ideology in foreign policy when they are geopolitically unconstrained—that is, when they are very strong, unthreatened, or distant from trouble. A corollary proposition, advanced by Krasner, is that disproportionate strength is likely to increase the temptation of ideologically-driven expansionism and the use of force. The Bush doctrine and Iraq policy seem to confirm these fears. We accept that this can be one consequence of unipolarity. However, alternative consequences are also logically plausible and empirically supportable.

The absence of pressing material constraints opens the door to ideology in foreign policy for two reasons. First, it might allow the state to indulge its ideological preferences without fear of the consequences for its survival and wealth. Humanitarian intervention, for example, might be a luxury consumption item for states whose own security and prosperity is not in doubt. Similarly, Stephen Walt has argued that states choose allies based on ideological affinity only if the threats they face are relatively weak.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the national interest is always ambiguous, but this is especially so when material power is great and threats are indirect, distant, long-term, or diffuse. In this situation, circumstances do not force different observers to converge on a consensus view; ideology is indispensable as a roadmap to action and a tool of persuasion. As Dean Acheson said about overselling the Cold War containment strategy at a peak of America’s relative power, “we made our points clearer than the truth” to convince the mass public.<sup>8</sup>

Plausible as these arguments may be, the opposite case may be equally plausible. States that are under intense international pressure may be especially vulnerable to myth-

<sup>5</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2d ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006); Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Barbara Sinclair, *Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Lemann, “The Controller: Karl Rove Is Working to Get George Bush Reelected, but He Has Bigger Plans,” *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 33-40.

<sup>8</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), 374-5; see also Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

ridden foreign policies. Hostile encirclements heighten the enemy images, bunker mentalities, and double standards in perception that are common in competitive relationships of all kinds, especially in international relations.<sup>9</sup> Nationalist and garrison-state ideologies are reinforced. Likewise, Charles Kupchan argues that declining empires typically adopt strategic ideologies of aggressive forward defense out of fear that their opponents will discover the truth about their growing weakness.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, diplomatic historians commonly applaud the pragmatism of powerful “off-shore balancers,” whose privileged position grants them the freedom to be selective and fact-driven, waiting upon developments before committing troops. Whether powerful, unconstrained states are more ideological than weaker or highly constrained states depends greatly on their domestic politics, not simply their position in the international system.<sup>11</sup>

Krasner’s corollary hypothesis—that powerful or unconstrained states are likely to succumb to an ideology of expansionism—is also an oversimplification. Powerful, secure states have the option to express their ideological values in the world through coercion, but they also have other options. They might choose to engage with the world pragmatically, taking what they need and ignoring the global problems that good fortune insulates them from. Or they might adopt a highly principled foreign policy that increases humanitarian assistance abroad, but eschews empire and declines to meddle in the internal politics of foreign peoples. Finally, they might be tempted by policies of limited liability, embarking on good works and moralistic hectoring abroad, but then heading for the exits when backlash makes costs rise.<sup>12</sup> Simply being powerful says little about whether or how ideology will express itself.

A further complication arises when the state is extraordinarily powerful but is threatened nonetheless—precisely the situation of the United States after September 11. Unipolar power grants uncommon freedom to act, and the high level of threat rules out strategies of indifference. As the Bush strategists argued, this situation required an assertive strategy of self-defense.<sup>13</sup> One doesn’t need to invoke ideology to understand why the United States attacked Afghanistan to remove Al Qaeda training camps. But such necessary responses can easily be overgeneralized into an imperial ideology that portrays the world as a place where ubiquitous threats must be countered by decisive, preventive action. Sometimes the security dilemma exists as a situation, but sometimes a situation simply loads the dice in favor of a security dilemma frame. Whether that framing overwhelms strategic reason will depend on the domestic political context, not just the international setting.

#### *American power, strategic ideas, and variations in polarity*

During the twentieth century, America’s great power and geographical distance from threats shaped its strategic ideas. However, variations in its relative power and in the polarity of the international system have not determined its strategic ideology in a

<sup>9</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chapters 2, 3, 8, and 9.

<sup>10</sup> Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 26-30.

<sup>13</sup> Office of the President, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002, at [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html).

simple or direct way. Instead, America's prevailing strategic mindset has been a product of its international position and American domestic politics.

A recent study of American strategic culture in the twentieth century by Colin Dueck describes an enduring tension between the ideological commitment to remake the world in America's image and the countervailing urge to do it on the cheap. U.S. power and geographical isolation set up this tension but did not determine how it would be resolved. Dueck portrays an endemic contest among four schools of thought: assertive internationalist liberals such as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy); "progressive" liberals such as Henry Wallace and George McGovern who seek to reform the world by example, not by intervention; nationalists such as Robert Taft and Jesse Helms who seek to limit international involvements and shun liberal rationales; and realists such as Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge who also set aside liberal ideals but are willing to use force to compete for dominance abroad. Dueck argues that the urge to limit liability abates under conditions of rising threat. In practice, this means that foreign threats play into the hands of assertive liberal internationalists, because realism does not resonate with American political culture.<sup>14</sup>

However, Dueck also shows how party politics shapes outcomes in ways that cannot simply be read from international circumstances or even from the strategic preferences of the various schools of thought. An example is the demise of Wilson's plan for the U.S. to enter the League of Nations. As threats declined after the World War, Americans' ingrained inclination to limit liability undercut Wilson's proposed automatic commitment to collective security. Realist critics like Lodge wanted a policy based on flexible, bilateral agreements with the powerful European democracies, a sensible outcome that would have been consistent with America's liberal strategic culture. Dueck shows, however, how the tactics of the rhetorical battle against the League played into the hands of the more isolationist elements in the Republican party.<sup>15</sup>

Although the rise and decline of threats affected the fortunes of competing strategic ideas, this did not track directly with variations in polarity. As one might expect, ideas of limited liability (a form of free riding or "buckpassing") were prominent in the multipolar period. However, the U.S. ultimately balanced against rising great power threats under multipolarity in the two World Wars. The U.S. often limited its liability under unipolarity, too: the elder Bush's refusal to intervene in Bosnia, Clinton's turning a blind eye to the Rwanda genocide, Clinton's zero-casualty approach to resisting the expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo, and the younger Bush's 2000 campaign promise of a "humble foreign policy" that would eschew "nation building" like the mission creep in the Somali intervention. Unipolar America's major military effort of the 1990s was the limited-aims war to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression in Kuwait that threatened the world's oil supply. Carried out by a realist-packed Administration, the Gulf War was realist in motivation and strategy, not an ideological crusade. Even after September 11, the younger Bush declined to apply the principle of preventive war to the problem of North Korean nuclear proliferation on the practical grounds that the North Koreans could level the South Korean capital in retaliation against a preventive strike.

Conversely, U.S. Cold War strategy under the tight constraints of the bipolar nuclear stalemate was highly ideological, founded on the encompassing rationale of a struggle to the death of antithetical social systems. Military interventions anywhere and everywhere were justified by the sweeping claims of the domino theory, which held that

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<sup>14</sup> Dueck, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Dueck, chapter 3.

small setbacks in geopolitical backwaters would exert a ripple effect undercutting commitments to central allies. The Cold War consensus was in part a reaction to the rising Communist threat, but it was also a result of the selling of Cold War ideology and the policy of global containment. This ideology was shaped by the domestic political project of reconciling the Asia-first Republican nationalist, Europe-first liberal internationalist, and realist constituencies inside government and among the broader public.<sup>16</sup>

In short, the degree of American power preponderance and the polarity of the international system say little in themselves about how ideological or interventionist American strategy was in a given era. To understand those ideas, it is necessary to look also at the domestic political setting.

### *Strategic ideology and domestic politics*

A useful dictionary definition of ideology is “the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program.”<sup>17</sup> A strategic ideology includes assertions about goals and values (e.g., all states should be democracies; the national interest is the right criterion for judging policy), categories for defining situations or problems (e.g., rogue states; weapons of mass destruction), and causal theories or hypotheses (e.g., offense is the best defense; Saddam Hussein is undeterrable; the Arab street will bandwagon with whoever is most powerful). The more integrated these elements are in a coherent package that supports a political program, the more pronounced is their ideological character.

Ideology is often used as a term of disparagement when the cohesion of the ideas and their service to the political program are allowed to bulldoze over inconvenient facts. Any ideology selects and organizes facts. Even realism, which prides itself on the subordination of wishes to the realistic appraisal of hard facts of power and interest, is ideological insofar as it asserts values, defines categories, and defends unproved theories in the service of a political program. Nonetheless, some ideologies are more prone to fact-bulldozing than others. Public opinion surveys found that six of ten Bush supporters in the 2004 Presidential election believed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and three of four believed that Iraq had provided substantial support to Al Qaeda.<sup>18</sup> Public opinion scholar Steven Kull says this echoes Leon Festinger’s research on the psychology of “cognitive dissonance” in millenarian sects that believed more strongly in the impending end of the world after their prophecies had failed.<sup>19</sup> But Democrats who had initially supported the war were far less prone to these misperceptions, suggesting that that partisan ideological framing reveals more than individual psychology.

The domestic political setting affects strategic ideas at several levels. Most basic is the effect of regime type—in particular, whether the country is a well institutionalized democracy. The traditional view, articulated by Walter Lippmann, portrays democratic

<sup>16</sup> For elaboration, Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 7; also Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*.

<sup>17</sup> *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam, 1969), 413.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Kull, “Americans and Iraq on the Eve of the Presidential Election,” Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), October 28, 2004; see also Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118:4 (Winter 2003-2004), 569-598.

<sup>19</sup> Leon Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

publics as fickle, ill-informed, and swayed by passions rather than reason.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, scholars of the democratic peace now see democracies as strategically astute. The democratic marketplace of ideas evaluates strategies more effectively than do closed authoritarian cabals.<sup>21</sup> As a result, democracies not only do not fight each other, but they also tend to win the wars they start, pay lesser costs in war, choose conflicts more wisely than non-democracies, and learn lessons from imperial setbacks more astutely. Such claims about the intelligence of democracy have been tarnished by the poor quality of the American public debate between September 11 and the Iraq invasion, especially the failure of the Democratic opposition and the media to mount sustained scrutiny of manipulated intelligence and dubious strategic assertions.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, however, the system worked: Congressional hearings and journalistic inquiries exposed errors, the blatant facts of strategic failure in Iraq shifted public opinion against the war, and Democrats exploited skepticism about the Iraq war to gain a Congressional majority in the 2006 election. Democracies make mistakes but eventually correct them; non-democratic expansionist great powers like Germany and Japan have been more likely to keep pushing ahead when strategy fails and the costs of expansion rise steeply.<sup>23</sup>

The quality of strategic ideas may be affected not only by the broad regime type, but also by the specific character of the ruling coalition, elite divisions and consensus, and the dynamic of party competition. When the ruling coalition contains powerful groups with a bureaucratic, commercial, or ideological stake in military expansion, they may use the public relations resources and bully pulpit of national government to promote the “myths of empire” – i.e., the assertions that security requires expansion, offense is the best defense, the enemy is undeterrable but hollow, conquest is cheap and easy, dominoes fall, threats gain allies, and policies that benefit the ruling group also benefit the nation. Although such myth-making is more blatant in undemocratic or semi-democratic regimes, a weaker version of the same dynamic may also color strategic debate in democracies.<sup>24</sup> Where imperial interest groups were well positioned as veto players in democratic empires, they effectively advanced creative rationales to drag their feet on decolonization.<sup>25</sup> Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld revived the domino theory to explain why the U.S. could not withdraw from Iraq, telling the Senate Armed Services Committee that this would lead to a series of challenges from radical movements and that America would wind up fighting closer to home.<sup>26</sup> Unipolarity (or any preponderance of power) should be conducive to selling some of the myths of empire (e.g., the argument

<sup>20</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).

<sup>21</sup> Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19-25.

<sup>22</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,” *International Security* 29:1 (summer 2004), 5-48; Ronald Krebs, “Selling the Market Short?” *International Security* 29:4 (spring 2005) and rebuttal by Kaufmann, 196-207.

<sup>23</sup> Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49-52 and chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>24</sup> Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, chapters 5 and 7; Jack Snyder, “Imperial Temptations,” *The National Interest* No. 71 (Spring 2003), 29-40.

<sup>25</sup> Hendrik Spruyt, *Ending Empire: Contested Sovereignty and Territorial Partition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); see also Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> According to Rumsfeld, “If we left Iraq prematurely as the terrorists demand, the enemy would tell us to leave Afghanistan and then withdraw from the Middle East. And if we left the Middle East, they’d order us and all those who don’t share their militant ideology to leave what they call the occupied Muslim lands from Spain to the Philippines.” Testimony of August 3, 2006; subject of a *New York Times* editorial, “The Sound of One Domino Falling,” August 4, 2006.

that the conquest of Iraq would be, as one enthusiast claimed, “a cakewalk”), but it may complicate the selling of others (e.g., the assertion that a small, distant rogue state threatens the superpower’s basic security).

Even in democracies, the strategic ideas of the Executive go essentially unchallenged unless leading figures of the opposition party speak out against them. Media critics and non-governmental experts have little clout on their own. Bipartisan consensus behind the Executive can reflect true agreement on policy, but it can also reflect the opposition’s fear of challenging a popular president who has advantages of information, initiative, and symbolism of national unity in a time of crisis. Only one Senate Democrat who faced a close race for re-election in 2002 voted against the resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Consensus can also reflect a logroll in which potential opponents restrain their criticism in exchange for deference to their interests on other issues. In the late 1940s, before the forging of the Cold War consensus, a large bloc of neo-isolationist Midwestern Republicans and some conservative Southern Democrats were highly skeptical of economic and military commitments to Europe, though they were more inclined to back the Chinese Nationalists against the Communists. Conversely, Eastern internationalists and realist foreign policy professionals like George Kennan had their eye mainly on the struggle for mastery in the power centers of Europe. Acheson’s NSC-68 global containment study provided a rationale that forged a consensus among these disparate, mistrustful groups. Unipolarity does not guarantee such consensus, but the vast resources available to the predominant power in the international system can facilitate logrolls in which all objectives—neo-conservative, assertive realist, humanitarian—are addressed simultaneously.

When partisan or intragovernmental divisions do emerge, the side with the greatest propaganda resources wins, says Jon Western’s study of American military interventions. These resources include the uniquely persuasive platform of the Presidency, the informational advantages of the contending sides (including access to facts, analytical expertise, persuasive credibility, and access to media), and the duration of the crisis (the longer the crisis, the greater the chance for critics of the Executive to make their case). A successful persuader for intervention needs to convince the public that a credible threat exists and that there is a convincing plan to achieve victory.<sup>28</sup> Unipolarity should make it easier to convince the public that victory is likely, assuming that the credibility of the threat is not in question.

Western points out that the plausibility of the case for intervention depends in part on the “latent opinion” of the audience, which is colored by expectations formed in the most recent relevant case. The case for attacking Iraq after September 11, for example, was assessed in light of previous confrontations that primed the public to think the worst of Saddam’s regime. Latent opinion may also be heavily conditioned by a prevailing strategic frame.<sup>29</sup> For example, universally disseminated and widely accepted Cold War assumptions primed reactions to the spurious Gulf of Tonkin “incident” and to other escalatory moves in the Vietnam conflict. When a ready-made consensual frame is not

<sup>27</sup> Douglas C. Foyle, “Leading the Public to War? The Influence of American Public Opinion on the Bush Administration’s Decision to Go to War in Iraq,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 16:3 (2004), 284.

<sup>28</sup> Jon Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 14-23.

<sup>29</sup> For an innovative treatment of President Bush’s framing of the “war on terror,” see 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 (July-September 2007): Forthcoming.

available, as was the case in the 1990s, the case for intervention is more difficult to make.<sup>30</sup> The elder Bush tried out several frames for the 1991 Gulf War, starting with the threat to oil supplies, which fell flat, and subsequently emphasizing the danger from Saddam's nuclear and chemical programs. What worked best of all was framing through *fait accompli*: Americans decided that war was inevitable once Bush had deployed half a million troops in the Saudi desert, so it was better to get it over with.<sup>31</sup> Even discounting the short-lived "rally 'round the flag" effect at the beginning of a conflict, Presidential *faits accomplis* create the advantage of arguing that American prestige is already at stake and that criticism undermines the morale of "our troops in the field." Unilateral actions of this kind are easier to undertake under unipolarity because of their lesser risk.

Finally, partisan electoral incentives can affect the motivation and ability of politicians to propound foreign policy ideologies, including doctrines justifying military intervention abroad. International relations scholars have argued that leaders sometimes have incentives to launch a "diversionary war" to distract voters' attention from domestic problems, demonstrate competence through easy victories, or gamble against long odds to salvage their declining reputations.<sup>32</sup> Hard-pressed leaders of collapsing dictatorships or unstable, semi-democratic states might "gamble for resurrection" in this way, but this is too cynical a view of foreign policymaking in stable democracies. However, there may be subtler, but nonetheless powerful partisan political incentives for military intervention that do not require so cynical a view of leaders' motives. We argue that national security strategy played this role as a wedge issue for the Bush administration. Insofar as unipolarity increases the Executive's freedom of action in foreign affairs, it may create opportunities to reframe foreign policy assumptions to advance partisan projects in this way.

#### *National security policy as a wedge issue*

In the parlance of American politics, a party adopts a wedge issue strategy when it takes a polarizing stance on an issue that (1) lies off the main axis of cleavage that separates the two parties, (2) fits the values and attitudes of the party's own base, yet (3) can win votes among some Independents or members of the opposing party who can be persuaded to place a high priority on this issue.

It is worth stressing what this strategy is *not*. It is *not* just playing to the base; it is also designed to raid the opponent's base. It is *not* shifting the main axis of alignment, but adding an issue orthogonal to that axis. Indeed, a central purpose of the wedge strategy is to gain votes from the off-axis issue that allow the party to win office and thereby achieve policy dominance on the main axis of cleavage. This strategy does *not* necessarily involve moving toward the position of the median voter on the wedge issue. Wedge issues can work if they appeal to the party's base and to an intensely interested segment of the rival party's constituency, even if the majority of voters disagree on the issue, but those who oppose don't switch their votes for that reason. Finally, a wedge

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49-51; Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 39, 56-58.

<sup>32</sup> Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems," *International Studies Quarterly* 40:1 (March 1966), 133-172.

issue is *not* what students of American politics call a “valence issue” on which there is consensus. It is what they call a “positional issue,” which partisans make salient in a voter’s decision by taking a stand that is distinctive from the opponent’s.

In many political systems, the principal axis of partisan alignment has been economic. The richer portion of the voting population seeks to protect its property rights, limit progressive taxation and taxes on capital, and get state subsidies and protection for its business activities; the poorer portion seeks exactly the opposite. General theories of political development, including ones that are very much *au courant*, are based largely on this assumption.<sup>33</sup> Since many of the benefits that the rich seek would accrue only to a small minority of the voters (e.g., repealing the estate tax), achieving a majority in favor of these measures is a daunting task in a political system based on universal suffrage. Extending such economic payoffs down to the second-highest economic quartile is costly, and clever economic propaganda aimed at the middle class can accomplish only so much. To get what they want in a democracy, economic elites have an incentive to appeal to voters on the basis of a second dimension of cleavage to attract voters that do not share their economic interests.

The quintessential example of this strategy is “playing the ethnic card” in order to “divide and rule.” In India, for example, the BJP is a Hindu nationalist party with strong representation among upper caste Hindus. One of their motives has been to protect their economic position and career opportunities against the Congress Party’s affirmative action policies for lower castes and minorities.<sup>34</sup> To succeed, the BJP needs to win votes from precisely the lower caste constituencies that would benefit economically from their defeat. The BJP strategy has been to convince lower caste Hindus that the most important cleavage is not the economic one between lower and upper classes, but rather the religious and cultural one between Hindus and Muslims. To increase the salience of the religious cleavage, they have promoted divisive issues such as the demand to tear down an historic mosque on an allegedly holy Hindu site and build a Hindu temple there. On the eve of close elections in ethnically mixed cities, upper caste Indian politicians have repeatedly staged provocative marches through Muslim neighborhoods, spread false rumors of defilements perpetrated by Muslims, and used hired thugs to start riots.<sup>35</sup> When ethnicity is polarized in this way, the lower castes have voted with the BJP or other ethnically based parties, not as poor people with the Congress or class-based parties. Once the BJP has gained office in a given state, many of their electorate have been disappointed and voted them out in the subsequent election, but the strategy of emphasizing the non-economic cleavage works for a time.

Different non-economic issues can be used for this purpose as the circumstances require. In the American South, the economic elite won the votes of poor whites by playing the race card. Today wealthy, conservative Republicans try to appeal to voters that do not share their economic interests by stressing their stance on social issues like abortion, gay rights, and school prayer. Sectoral and regional economic interests can also be emphasized against class interests: sun belt versus rust belt; import-competing sectors against exporting sectors.

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<sup>33</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Susanne Hoeber and Lloyd I. Rudolph, “Modern Hate,” *The New Republic*, March 22, 1993, 24-29.

<sup>35</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Foreign policy can also be used as a wedge issue. This is especially apt if the economic elite really *does* hold a significant foreign policy interest in common with the poorer classes. For example, the coalition of free trade and empire was held together in Britain for a century by the complementary interests of the City of London financiers in capital mobility and the working classes' interest in cheap imported food.<sup>36</sup>

The most common strategy for using foreign policy as a wedge issue is to emphasize looming foreign threats that are alleged to overshadow domestic class divisions. This works especially well for elites when it can be combined with two other claims. The first is that concessions to elite economic interests are necessary on national security grounds. Thus, the Wilhelmine German elite coalition of "iron and rye" argued that a battle fleet and agricultural protection were needed in case of war with perfidious Britain. The second is the claim that domestic critics of the government are a fifth column for the external enemy. Bush and Cheney, for example, attacked Democrats who accused them of misleading the nation about Iraqi weapons programs, calling their criticisms "deeply irresponsible" and suggesting that they were undermining the war effort and abetting terrorism.<sup>37</sup> Although Democrats tried to neutralize this charge by supporting many of the Bush policies on terrorism and Iraq, the Republicans' longstanding hawkishness initially gave them greater credibility as stewards of the "war on terror." Thus, the wedge strategy was difficult to counter.

Assertive foreign policies can work as a self-fulfilling prophecy to create the foreign enemies that are needed to justify these rationales, whether cynical or sincere. Insofar as unipolarity gives the Executive more room for unilateral action and *faits accomplis*, it should facilitate this strategy.

For a wedge strategy to achieve its purpose, it must leave the ruling elite free to carry out its economic policy agenda. This is easiest if the economic policy rationale can be directly tied, as the Wilhelmine elites did, to the logic of the second cleavage issue. It is hardest if the foreign policy undermines the rationale for the economic policy, but even then creative rhetoric might sell it. For example, Ronald Reagan managed to reconcile tax cuts for the wealthy and the 600 ship navy through the logic of supply side economics, which rationalized the resulting budget deficits as good for growth. The intellectual cohesiveness of this package was also enhanced by the symbolic connection between "free enterprise" (that is, freed from tax-and-spend government) and the "free world" (militarily powerful enough to stay free from the Communist threat), both well established tropes of Cold War ideology.

Attracting votes by emphasizing a secondary cleavage works best if the underlying assumptions are well primed in public thinking as a result of a long-term campaign. The "Harry and Louise" television advertisements sponsored by a health insurance trade association undermined the Clinton health plan by piggy-backing on well-established Republican rhetoric about the evils of big government, which resonated with an increasingly affluent middle class that needed a government safety net less. However, priming can work too well, taking away the freedom of action of the governing elites. For example, the overselling of Cold War containment ideology handcuffed Lyndon Johnson in dealing with the escalation dilemma in Vietnam.

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 76-83.

<sup>37</sup> On Bush, see Richard W. Stevenson, "Bush Contends Partisan Critics Hurt War Effort," *New York Times*, November 12, 2005, A1, A10; Cheney said in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 8, 2004, that if Americans elect Kerry, "then the danger is that we'll get hit again...in a way that will be devastating from the standpoint of the United States."

A well institutionalized network of policy analysts helps the intellectual frame underpinning a wedge strategy to take hold and endure. Neo-conservatives invested heavily in policy research institutes, human capital, and media presence that created and promoted an unusually integrated set of ideas across economic, social, and foreign policy questions.<sup>38</sup> This effort explained how the non-economic wedge issues were part of a coherent worldview that included the economic dimension as well, decreasing the risk that issues on the secondary axes would simply replace the primary one.

In short, a move to open up a secondary dimension of cleavage, such as one based on foreign policy, requires priming and institutionalization. It also requires an opportunity, such as a favorable shift in relative power or a new threat that calls attention to the issue. The convergence of unipolarity, September 11, and neo-conservative ideological priming were in that sense the perfect political opportunity.

### *Polarization and wedge issue politics*

In a one-dimensional policy spectrum where voter preferences bunch toward the middle, parties must become more moderate to attract more votes. Since the 1975, American party competition has reflected the opposite strategy, despite the fact that the underlying distribution of voter preferences on issues and liberal-conservative ideology remains bell-shaped. Politicians and activists in both parties have declined to moderate their appeals to attract the independent median voter, and instead have emphasized ideologically assertive stances in order to attract support from and mobilize their party base. Karl Rove says, “there is no middle!”<sup>39</sup> As a complement to this strategy, they have sought to peel off targeted constituencies from the opposing camp by emphasizing secondary cleavages. Until September 11, these wedge issues were mainly social or race issues. Subsequently, foreign policy was added to the repertoire.

Unlike the competition for the median voter described in the theory of Anthony Downs, this works not through moderation but through polarization.<sup>40</sup> To make a secondary cleavage salient, a party’s stance needs to be distinctive enough to make it worthwhile for a voter to choose based on that dimension.<sup>41</sup> Wedge issue politics is a politics of divisive position-taking.

Students of American politics agree that the political parties’ stances on issues have become increasingly polarized in domestic issue areas since 1975, and party identification has become increasingly correlated with ideology on the liberal-conservative dimension. This is true despite the fact that public attitudes are not substantially less moderate than before. What has happened is that the two parties put forward policy platforms that are more ideologically differentiated than they were in the past. The Republican party has moved far to the right, and the Democratic party has moved somewhat to the left.<sup>42</sup> As a result, voters have been re-sorting themselves, with liberal Republicans becoming Democrats and conservative Democrats becoming Republicans.<sup>43</sup> Elites, especially party leaders and activists, are more polarized in their

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<sup>38</sup> Sinclair, *Party Wars*, chapter 2; Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Lemann, “The Controller.”

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

<sup>41</sup> Fiorina, *Culture Wars*, 167-182.

<sup>42</sup> McCarty et al., *Polarized America*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Fiorina, 57-77.

views than the public at large, which suggests that elites are taking the initiative in the polarization process.<sup>44</sup>

Contributing to this process was the breakup of the Democratic “solid South” as a result of the civil rights revolution. Gradually, southern whites who remained in the Democratic party under the logroll of racial segregation and New Deal social programs have moved into the Republican party. White Republican southerners disproportionately embody a number of the characteristics of the polarizing conservative syndrome: increasingly affluent, traditional in religion and morals, resistant to programs designed to improve the situation of African Americans, and hawkish on foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> Statistically, region accounts for a substantial proportion of the polarization effect. However, polarization has also occurred outside the South, so that is not the whole explanation. Several hypotheses are in play.

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal argue that polarization was mainly the result of the large increase in the number affluent Americans who no longer need the governmental social safety net. They have voted their economic interests at the expense of immigrants who use social programs but lack the vote to defend them.<sup>46</sup> The result is a Republican coalition that blocks efforts to redistribute benefits to the less well off and a dramatic increase in economic inequality. These authors also see soft money from ideologically extreme campaign contributors as a secondary cause of polarization.

Other authors point to the political turmoil of the late 1960s, which led to the increased adoption of primary elections instead of conventions and caucuses to determine each party’s candidates for the general election.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, cohorts of ideologically motivated activists took over from an earlier generation of pragmatic politicians in both parties. Increasingly, the winning candidates appealed to the median voter in the party’s primary rather than the median voter in the general election. Mobilizing one’s own base with ideologically purist causes and attacking the opposition’s base with wedge issues became the new prevailing strategy. This worked in part because both parties were doing it simultaneously; the median voter had no attractive option. As a result, some public opinion research suggests a substantial decline in office-holders’ responsiveness to changes in public opinion over recent decades.<sup>48</sup>

Polarization developed at different rates for different issue areas. Polarization on economic issues was already central to the New Deal cleavage structure, and that has remained largely unchanged. Income level is the strongest predictor of the vote even of “born again” evangelicals in the South.<sup>49</sup>

Polarization based on economic issues presents an endemic problem for Republicans, because a majority of American voters *always* says it wants the government to “do more” on big ticket items such as supporting education, health care, and the environment. Even at the low ebb of support for big-government liberalism when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, about half of the public said the government was spending

<sup>44</sup> Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy," in Morton H. Halperin, Jeffrey Laurenti, Peter Rundlet, and Spencer P. Boyer, eds. *Power and Superpower: Global Leadership and Exceptionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2007), pp. 49-68.

<sup>45</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 41-44.

<sup>46</sup> McCarty et al, 108, and chapter 4.

<sup>47</sup> James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jacobs and Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander*, 17-19.

<sup>48</sup> Jacobs and Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander*, chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> McCarty et al, *Polarized America*, 108.

too little on such items and only a tenth said it was spending too much.<sup>50</sup> Even most Americans who self-identify as “conservative” are operationally liberal in the sense that they want government to spend more money on such programs.<sup>51</sup> This conflicted group comprises 22% of the entire electorate.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that most Americans want liberal spending policies by an activist government puts Republicans in a chronic bind. One rhetorical solution has been to emphasize conservative symbols, including patriotism, which resonate more strongly than liberal symbols with the majority of voters.<sup>53</sup> On the symbol of “big government,” most Americans agree with the Republicans, but on actual big-government policies, they usually agree with the Democrats.

A second solution has been to use non-economic wedge issues to try to overcome the chronic Republican disadvantage on economic issues. The Republicans have tried out a series of these issues in attempts to increase the party fold without having to compromise on their basic economic platform, starting with race and affirmative action from 1964 to 1980, and then shifting to conservative stances on gender and abortion issues.<sup>54</sup> Polarization on social and cultural values issues such as abortion, gay rights, and the role of religion in public life increased further in the 1990s.

This strategy achieved mixed results. Larry Bartels calculates that the Republicans’ electoral payoff of the abortion issue has declined among non-college-educated white voters since 1996. Among this group, the impact of seven cultural wedge issues—abortion, gun control, school vouchers, gay marriage, the death penalty, immigration, and gender—on voting in the 2004 election was about two-thirds that of a comparable set of economic issues. In contrast, defense spending and military intervention ranked near the top of the list of politically potent issues.<sup>55</sup> Empire became the new wedge issue, picking up where social issues left off.

Foreign policy was for a long time the laggard in polarization. Support for the Vietnam War declined in lockstep among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Democratic support briefly decline more steeply when Vietnam became Nixon’s war in 1969, but the Republican trend caught up by 1971.<sup>56</sup> The partisan difference averaged only 5%.<sup>57</sup> Partisan differences in support for the Korean, Persian Gulf, Kosovo, and Afghanistan wars were also relatively small, with the Gulf War recording the greatest difference, averaging about 20%.<sup>58</sup> The Reagan period widened the divergence in foreign policy views between Republicans and Democrats, but the gap closed again with the end of the Cold War.<sup>59</sup> Even at the peak divergence in the 1980s, the two parties remained “parallel publics:” their attitudes moved in the same direction over time in response to events.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, chapter 3.

<sup>52</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 94-95.

<sup>54</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 71-74.

<sup>55</sup> Larry M. Bartels, “What’s the Matter with *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (2006), 218.

<sup>56</sup> John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 119.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 134-138.

<sup>59</sup> Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004), 168-174.

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 7; Peter Trubowitz and Nicole

There are two main reasons for the lag in partisan polarization in foreign policy. First, Democratic foreign policy establishment figures such as Zbigniew Brzezinski remained well within the Cold War consensus in response to Soviet military buildups and Soviet adventures in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Although the Republicans had a mild post-Vietnam advantage as the more credible party on national defense, there was not a large enough wedge to exploit for partisan advantage. Second, the end of the Cold War left Americans without a convincing frame for foreign policy as a wedge issue, and notwithstanding the Gulf War, no sufficiently galvanizing event to formulate a new one.

All that changed with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. After some initial months of bipartisan support, the partisan divergence in support for the Iraq War ranged between 40% and 90% depending on the question asked.<sup>61</sup> Since September 11, there is not only a wider gap between Republicans and Democrats across a broad range of foreign policy issues, but their views have moved in opposite directions in response to new information. In 1998, 31 percent of Republicans believed that the planet was warming, but by 2006 only 26% did, whereas Democrats increased from 39 to 46% and Independents from 31 to 45%.<sup>62</sup> Partisans increasingly live in conceptually different foreign policy worlds.

In the aggregate, this polarization seems mainly related to the strategies of politicians and political activists, not to the radicalization of mass attitudes. Aggregate attitude data shows that Americans are more “purple” than red and blue, but politicians tell surveys that they base their policy choices on their own conscience rather than constituency wishes.<sup>63</sup> Activist organizations, movements, and ideological brain trusts have been less moderate than the voters.<sup>64</sup> Political strategists like Rove make no secret of the tactic of mobilizing their partisan base.<sup>65</sup>

Notwithstanding this largely top-down dynamic, the polarization process is not just a result of re-sorting, mobilizing, and exploiting wedge issues. Part of the polarization strategy, especially on the Republican side, has also been to persuade people to adopt a coherent ideology that links conservatism across economic, social, and foreign policy issues. Neo-conservatism is an ideological movement that has aimed tirelessly at that goal. Whether it has succeeded among partisan Republicans is difficult to assess. The match between partisanship and ideological self-identification is much tighter now than in the past, but this could be the result of sorting as well as persuasion. Some evidence of increasingly ideological thinking may be found in the fact that ideology and partisanship are increasingly powerful as predictors of changes in attitudes on issues, whereas changes in attitudes on issues are becoming weaker as predictors of change in partisanship and ideology.<sup>66</sup> In other words, people are increasingly reasoning from the general ideology to the specific issue, rather than starting by developing attitudes on issues and then asking which party or ideology best fits the views that they hold.

It is mainly politics, not intellectual substance, that makes polarized ideas cohere across their economic, social, and foreign policy dimensions. One might think that

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Mellow, “Going Bipartisan: Politics by Other Means,” *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (Fall 2005), 433-455, figure 2; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon, “Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy,” Jacobson, *A Divider*, 7-9

<sup>61</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 131-3; *New York Times*, March 27, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> ABC News/Time/Stanford poll, *Global Warming*, March 26, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, “Purple America,” unpubl. ms., MIT, September 2005; Lawrence R. Jacobs, Eric D. Lawrence, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Steven S. Smith, “Congressional Leadership of Public Opinion,” *Political Science Quarterly* 113:1 (Spring 1998), 21-41.

<sup>64</sup> Sinclair, *Party Wars*, chapter 2.

<sup>65</sup> Lemann, “The Controller.”

<sup>66</sup> NES panel data, discussed below.

policy syndromes hang together across these dimensions because they are mutually reinforcing for substantive reasons. But this can't explain the Bush policies: massive tax cuts, costly social security privatization, and a trillion dollar foreign war hardly go together. Alternatively, one might think that ideological linkages across issues reflect the pattern laid down by the cleavages of the 1960s, when the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and the counterculture produced a backlash among social conservatives. But these cleavages preceded partisan polarization and fit poorly with the economic thread of the polarization story. A more potent explanation for the pattern of cohesiveness across issues lies in the attitudes of white Southern evangelicals, who became the core of the Republican constituency with the rise of the sun belt economy. These voters set the tune to which other Republicans had to march in order to achieve their partisan and policy objectives. Finally, a broader argument might stress a culturally engrained set of attitudes that George Lakoff calls the strict father and the nurturing parent syndromes, which resonate respectively with the cultural constituencies of Republican conservatives and Democratic liberals.<sup>67</sup> But Lakoff himself argues that the coherence of these syndromes stems only from the rhetoric of the storytellers, who purposefully construct a tale that makes the disparate elements of regressive economics, conservative morality, and war seem to go together.

Why would the storytellers do this rather than argue each issue independently? Republicans seeking economic policies that benefit a minority of Americans have an incentive to shift the axis of partisan cleavage away from economic redistribution and towards some other dimension of policy, such as race, cultural values, or national security. Presenting the whole set of polarized issues as an integrated package reduces the risk that the audience will gravitate only toward candidates who play up the popular issues (say, the war on terror) and abandon the fight for the more dubious economic issues (say, estate tax repeal and social security privatization). The ideological brand name needs to be defended as a whole.

September 11 gave the Bush Administration a chance to extend this logic of polarization into the realm of foreign affairs. At least in the short run, it worked: support for Bush on the war on terror provided his margin of victory in the 2004 election in the face of skepticism about his economic agenda.<sup>68</sup> This does not mean that this is a policy of conscious manipulation. Rather, it is a strategy that has a political rationale that favors those conservatives whose ideas give them a natural affinity for it. The polarization process of the past three decades has been a crucible of competitive selection for precisely this kind of Republican. The combination of unipolarity and September 11 gave them an opportunity to try it out on a larger scale than ever before.

### *September 11 and the politics of the Bush doctrine*

The Bush Administration took office with a mixed foreign affairs team of cautious realists like Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, traditional Cold War hawks like Vice President Richard Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, neo-conservative idealists like Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and an uncommitted President who had argued for a restrained

<sup>67</sup> George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "Voters and Values in the 2004 election," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69: 5 (2005, special issue): 744-59; Sunshine D. Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 38 (April 2005), 201-209.

foreign policy during the campaign. The idea of unilaterally asserting American primacy to forestall the development of new post-Cold War power centers in Europe or Asia was an old one for this group. Under the elder Bush, Wolfowitz had been too bold in putting that idea at the center of a draft Defense Guidance document, and the document was suppressed. During the 1990s, neo-conservative intellectuals and pundits wrote openly about the use of the “unipolar moment” to reshape global politics to America’s liking, by force if necessary. Still, the moment was not right: Republicans shied away from “nation building” in the developing world, associating it with quixotic do-gooder Democrats. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were on record as calling for regime change in Iraq, but so was Bill Clinton. Rice had argued prominently in favor of deterring Saddam from further aggression, implying that he was in fact deterrable.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, after a decade of Iraqi defiance over no-fly zones and inspections, the public was well primed for the possibility of a renewed war with Saddam’s regime: in February 2001, 52% favored “military action to force Saddam Hussein from power if it would result in substantial U.S. military casualties;” 42% were opposed.<sup>70</sup>

September 11 created the opportunity not only to invade Iraq to depose Saddam but also to dramatically reframe American foreign policy in a way that would unleash conservative Republican principles for purposes that would resonate broadly with the American public. The new doctrine, unveiled in the President’s West Point speech in July 2002 and codified in the September 2002 National Security Strategy memorandum, argued that in an era of global terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the United States could not wait to be attacked; it needed to attack preventively to transform states that harbor terrorists and other rogue states into cooperative democracies. The United States would act unilaterally if necessary: it would explain its ideas to the world, but it would not ask for a “permission slip” to “shift the balance of power in favor of freedom.”<sup>71</sup> These ideas were presented as relevant not only to the struggle against Al Qaeda, but to the “axis of evil” of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, to an open-ended “global war on terror,” and even to promotion of democracy in China.

This was the ultimate wedge issue. The Bush doctrine was well prepared ideologically by neo-conservative thinkers. It was grounded in the hawkish, unilateralist instincts of the Republican elites and their conservative base, including the traditionally military-oriented South. Ideologically and psychologically, it resonated with the Republicans’ instincts to be tough on domestic threats and evil-doers: e.g., their characteristic hard-line stance on crime, the death penalty, and social deviance of all kinds. It neutralized criticism from liberal Democrats through its promotion of democracy. It exploited what scholars of public opinion call a “valence” (or consensus) issue—the overriding security issues of concern to all Americans after September 11—but it went far beyond that. The Iraq application of the doctrine, well primed among the public, would demonstrate better than the too-easy Afghan mission that this was a problem-solving concept of wide utility. Thus, Iraq was a “positional issue” that would differentiate Republican from Democratic policies, hold the Republican base, and gain some votes among Independents and Democrats who could be convinced of the high

<sup>69</sup> She wrote that “the first line of defense should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence—if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration.” Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 79:1 (January/February 2000), 61. More generally, see George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>70</sup> Foyle, “Leading the Public to War?” 274.

<sup>71</sup> Lakoff, 11; The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2001.

priority of this issue.<sup>72</sup> To accomplish this, however, Iraq would have to be seen as part of the bigger picture. Asked how voters would view the Iraq issue in the 2004 election, Rove said, “they will see the battle for Iraq as a chapter in a longer, bigger struggle, as a part of the war on terrorism.”<sup>73</sup>

Unipolarity helped to make the wedge issue feasible. America’s unipolar power made implementation seem low risk and low cost, especially important to Rumsfeld’s plan for a streamlined, more useable army. If this worked, and the Administration could see no reason why it wouldn’t, the strategy might transform the Middle East, and at the same time give the Republicans a lock on American politics as the principled, problem-solving party.

An early glimpse of the political benefits that the strategy might bring was evident in the Congressional elections of 2002. In pre-election polls, notes Gary Jacobson, “most respondents thought the Democrats would do a better job dealing with health care, education, Social Security, prescription drug benefits, taxes, abortion, unemployment, the environment, and corporate corruption,” and the Republicans “with terrorism, the possibility of war with Iraq, the situation in the Middle East, and foreign affairs generally.”<sup>74</sup> Bush’s popularity scared off well qualified Democratic challengers: only a tenth of Republican incumbents faced Democratic challengers who had ever held public elective office, as opposed to the usual figure of a quarter.<sup>75</sup> On the eve of the election, Rove is said to have recommended pushing for a largely unconditional Senate endorsement of the use of force against Iraq, rather than accepting greater bipartisan backing for the somewhat more equivocal Biden-Lugar bill.<sup>76</sup> In classic wedge-issue style, Rove wanted the sharpest possible difference between Republicans and Democrats in order to heighten the political salience of the war vote relative to economic concerns. Overall, Rove’s private PowerPoint presentation on campaign strategy advised Republican candidates to “focus on the war.”<sup>77</sup> Buoyed by a huge turnout among the Republican base, the Republicans picked up six seats in the House and two in the Senate, bucking the normal tendency for parties in power to slip in mid-term elections.

### *The selling of the Iraq war*

After September 11, it was not difficult to convince the American public that Saddam’s regime should be attacked. In a poll taken on September 13, 2001, 34% thought it very likely and another 44% thought it somewhat likely that Saddam had been “personally involved in Tuesday’s terrorist attacks.”<sup>78</sup> Over 70% supported military action in Iraq, including removing Saddam from power, in polls taken in October and November.<sup>79</sup> In November, support for war was above 80% among Republicans and around 70% for Independents and Democrats.<sup>80</sup>

These opinions reflect the public’s long established view of Saddam as a relentless enemy who was defying the UN inspection regime, challenging the US-enforced no-flight zones in northern and southern Iraq, and gleefully cheering the

<sup>72</sup> Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 62, on valence and positional issues.

<sup>73</sup> Lemann, “The Controller.”

<sup>74</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 89.

<sup>75</sup> Jacobson, 89, note 30.

<sup>76</sup> Packer, *Assassin’s Gate*, 388.

<sup>77</sup> James Carney, “General Karl Rove, Reporting for Duty,” *Time Magazine*, September 29, 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Jacobson, 96.

<sup>79</sup> Foyle, 273; Jacobson, 97;

<sup>80</sup> Jacobson, 98.

September 11 attacks. Still, it would be an exaggeration to say that the public's view was completely uncoached. Within hours of the attack, lower level officials and hawkish commentators who later emerged as collaborators with the Administration in making the case for war mounted a public relations effort to link Iraq to the attack on the World Trade Center. On September 11, Professor Fouad Ajami, an adviser to the Bush Administration in developing its thinking on Iraq, told Dan Rather on a CBS broadcast:

Saddam Hussein celebrated today, called it a great day.... The wing of the administration which actually believes in roll-back in Iraq, not in containment—they believe that the containment of Saddam was a mistake, and they believe that they should now actually finish the job that they didn't do a decade ago.... We will have to go to the source in Baghdad if it's indeed Saddam Hussein who got himself involved in this.<sup>81</sup>

On September 12, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz began to press in private Administration meetings for an attack on Iraq, and word started to filter out to the press. On September 13, Wolfowitz told reporters that an anti-terror strategy had to include “removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, and ending states who sponsor terrorism.” Robert Burns' Associated Press story on Wolfowitz's remarks quoted “other defense officials” who “said it was clear the administration would go well beyond the limited strikes of recent years against Iraq.” Amidst similar commentary from other sources, NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell reported on the Today show on September 14 about State Department “talk of an attack on Saddam Hussein,... it's not just Bin Laden.”<sup>82</sup> The American public's readiness to hit back was surely spontaneous, but the Administration and hawkish commentators were already channeling this impulse toward Iraq. For the most hawkish elements in the Administration, Iraq was a wedge issue that could be usefully deployed not only against Democrats but also against more prudent voices in the Administration, such as Colin Powell and key military chiefs.

From the beginning, top Administration figures maneuvered around the question of whether attacking Saddam depended on linking him to the September 11 attacks. President Bush told the National Security Council on September 17, “I believe Iraq was involved, but I'm not going to strike them now. I don't have evidence at this point.”<sup>83</sup> The intelligence community was told to go look for that evidence. The most promising initial lead was a rumored meeting between 9/11 team leader Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence agent, but the *New York Times* soon revealed this to be bogus.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, the *New York Times* reported on September 19 that Wolfowitz, Cheney, and Cheney's deputy I. Lewis Libby were urging toppling Saddam's regime by force and that prominent conservatives were circulating a letter supporting this even if it turned out that Saddam was not involved in September 11. Bush told Rumsfeld on November 21 to start drafting a war plan for Iraq.

Despite the fact that public support was running high for attacking Iraq, the Bush war hawks found that they needed to persuasively link Saddam to 9/11 or to Al Qaeda

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Yaeli Bloch-Elkon and Robert Y. Shapiro, “Deep Suspicion: Iraq, Misperception, and Partisanship,” *Public Opinion Pros*, June 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro, “Deep Suspicion.”

<sup>83</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 99.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Bonner, *New York Times*, October 11, 2001, reported that experts doubted Iraq's role. On the intelligence review, see Western, *Selling Intervention*, 191.

and also to “weapons of mass destruction,” which would make those terror ties even more dangerous. In a September 2002 poll, taken after President Bush’s UN speech seeking support for the war, over 80% of American respondents who believed Iraq had WMD and that Saddam was personally involved in 9/11 favored removing his regime by force; 60% who believed only that Iraq had WMD favored war; and 40% who believed neither favored war. Democrats were especially conditional in their support for the war, with nearly 80% favoring war if they accepted both reasons, 50% if they accepted only that Iraq had WMD, and less than a quarter if they believed neither.<sup>85</sup> As war approached in February (and March) 2003, only 28% (and then 37%) of Democrats thought that the President had presented enough evidence to justify the war. Independents were on average closer to the Democrats, a third of the distance between them and the Republicans, on these questions. As late as January 2003, only 40% of all respondents, regardless of party, favored going to war without UN backing and with only one or two major allies—a figure that moved up to 50% after Colin Powell’s February 5 UN speech presenting purported evidence of Iraqi WMD and Al Qaeda ties.<sup>86</sup>

The Bush Administration’s strategy for persuading public opinion, especially outside the Republican base, consisted of three elements. The first was to exaggerate the relevance and reliability of alleged facts proving the Al Qaeda tie and the existence of WMD programs: the infamous aluminum tubes, the non-existent uranium purchase from Niger, the related campaign to smear whistle-blowers Joseph and Valerie Plame Wilson, the bogus inside dope from Iraqi émigrés, and the later disavowed factoids in Powell’s crucial UN speech. Gullible, star-struck, or ideologically committed journalists helped to give this public relations campaign a veneer of objectivity.<sup>87</sup>

The second element was the use of evocative and evasive rhetoric to make the links among 9/11, WMD, and Saddam’s regime. Tag phrases like the “axis of evil” and the “war on terror” created an emotionally compelling catch-all category that included all bad things whether or not they were functionally similar or operationally connected.<sup>88</sup> Bush’s speeches were masterful in juxtaposing Al Qaeda, terror, WMD, and Saddam in adjacent sentences without making precise causal claims that could be refuted.<sup>89</sup> This rhetoric continued through and after the 2004 Presidential election. In November 2004, 56% of Bush supporters (like 49% of Kerry supporters) thought that the Bush Administration was claiming that Iraq had given Al Qaeda substantial support; 63% of Bush supporters (comparable to 58% of Kerry supporters) thought that the Bush Administration was claiming that Iraq had WMD prior to the war.<sup>90</sup> The difference was not in their view of Bush claims, but in whether the voter believed them: the majority of Bush voters did, and Kerry voters didn’t.

The third element was to place the Iraq issue in the larger context of a new strategic vision that would encompass the “global war on terror,” the struggle against authoritarian rogue states, the promotion of American democratic values abroad, and even the strategic competition with China. These elements were all tied together in the

<sup>85</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 115.

<sup>86</sup> Jacobson, 109, 114.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Massing, “The End of News?,” *The New York Review of Books*, December 1, 2005; and Massing, “The Press: The Enemy Within,” *The New York Review of Books*, December 15, 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Western, *Selling Intervention*, 195-6.

<sup>89</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, “Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration’s Rhetoric,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3:3 (September 2005), 525-537.

<sup>90</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 185; Steven Kull, “The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters,” PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll, October 21, 2004.

September 2002 National Security Strategy memorandum, the Bush doctrine giving the rationale for preventive war. This was implicitly tied to unipolarity in that American military superiority gave it the ability to act preventively, lest the “smoking gun” warning of attack be “a mushroom cloud.”<sup>91</sup> The section on China’s need to democratize also had an implicit link to unipolarity: things would go well for China if it fit into America’s vision of the coming world; if not, America had the power to put China on notice.

Although this broader view of American primacy was dear to the hearts of Wolfowitz and the neo-conservatives, it received only secondary play in the rationale for the war itself. No public opinion polls have demonstrated that a significant proportion of the U.S. public wants to go to war to spread democracy. There is no indication that Rumsfeld or Cheney cared about the democracy promotion aspects of the strategic doctrine. Only later, after Bush’s re-election and the need to shift rationales for staying the course in Iraq, did Bush elevate the importance of promoting Middle Eastern democracy in his Second Inaugural Address. However, the fiasco of democracy in Iraq—not to mention the other Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, and Lebanon that in 2005 elected terrorists, sectarians, or nuclear proliferators—left this broadest rationale stillborn.

#### *The polarizing consequences of the war*

On the first day of the war, the Bush Administration had the support of 73% of respondents, but support among Democrats remained soft and conditional: 51% of them supported having gone to war, but only 38% supported the troops *and* the policy, whereas 12% supported the troops but opposed the policy. If the war and Iraqi democracy had gone well, the weakness of the WMD and Al Qaeda tie rationales might not have mattered. In the brief moment in March 2003 when a cheap, quick victory seemed assured, the proportion saying that the war would have been worth it even if no WMD were found jumped 20% among Republicans and 10% among Democrats and Independents. Success might have been its own justification, strategically and politically. But this was not to be. Instead of exploiting the war as a wedge issue, the Bush Administration had instead created the most polarizing issue ever in the history of American foreign policy—and one that probably worked to the Republicans’ disadvantage. The 19% of voters who said that terrorism was the most important issue voted heavily for Bush in 2004, but the 15% of voters who identified Iraq as the key issue voted disproportionately for Kerry.<sup>92</sup>

Attitude trends after the invasion confirm that Democratic and Independent support was conditional on the WMD and terrorism rationales, whereas Republicans seem largely unaffected by evidence. In February 2003, 79% of Democrats believed that Iraq had WMD, and fifteen months later only 33% did. In contrast, as late as 2005,

<sup>91</sup> Western, *Selling Intervention*, 209.

<sup>92</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 130, 143, 191. John H. Aldrich, Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Kristin Thompson Sharp, “Foreign Policy And The Electoral Connection,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9: 477-502 (2006), review the debate on the electoral impact of the Iraq issue. They note that J.E. Campbell, “The presidential election of 2004: the fundamentals and the campaign,” *Forum*, Vol. 2. (2004), <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol2/iss4/art1/> “argues that Bush’s margin of victory was smaller than one would predict based on economic variables. He attributes the gap to Iraq and notes that respondents who believed that the war was not going well voted heavily for Kerry.” On the other hand, Christopher Wlezien and Robert Erikson, “Post-election reflections on our pre-election predictions,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 38:1 (January 2005), 25–26, “conclude—based on their aggregate predictive model—that the Iraq war did not substantially hurt the president’s electoral performance.”

Republican belief in WMD actually increased to 81%. Between April 2003 and October 2005, belief in Saddam's involvement in 9/11 declined among Republicans from 65 to 44%, among Independents from 51 to 32%, and among Democrats from 49 to 25%.<sup>93</sup> Coinciding with these trends, an unprecedented 60% gap opened up between Republicans and Democrats during 2004 and 2005 on whether the war had been "the right thing to do" or "worth the cost," with Independents in between but closer to the Democrats. In April 2004 Democrats were most skeptical of the two rationales for war: of the 58% of Democrats who believed neither, only 8% thought the war had been the right thing to do. In contrast, the 34% of Republicans who were white "born again" Evangelical Christians supported the war at an unchanging rate of 85% and accepted the Administration's rationales for it unquestioningly. Not surprisingly, self-proclaimed conservative ideology was also a strong predictor of support for both the war and the Bush rationales for it.<sup>94</sup>

Are the Republicans becoming so ideological in their view of foreign affairs that they are impervious to information, or are they realistic, but dogged partisans sticking with their team as the best strategy in the face of adversity? And if they are increasingly ideological, is this a spontaneous reflection of grassroots thinking, a consequence of the Bush Administration's neo-conservative framing of foreign policy ideology, or simply a measure of who is left in the party after three decades of polarized sorting? Will the highly ideological foreign policy stance of the Republican base evaporate in the post-Bush era, or is it locked in?

These questions cannot be answered definitively, but an analysis of the unprecedented polarization of foreign affairs attitudes during the Bush presidency suggests an elite-driven ideological pattern. Partisanship is increasingly correlated with self-identification as liberal for Democrats and conservative for Republicans. Both partisanship and ideology are becoming increasingly important in explaining change in attitudes on domestic and foreign issues. Panel data from the early 1990s show that changes in respondents' attitudes on issues had a reciprocal effect on changes in their party identification, with a significant influence in both directions.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, panel data including both domestic and foreign policy issues from 2000, 2002, and 2004 show that the effect of changes of party identification and of ideology on issue attitudes overwhelms the reverse effect. (See Table 1.) This finding is consistent with the view that Bush's highly ideological framing of both domestic and foreign issues has effectively polarized the way people evaluate these issues, whether positively or negatively, along partisan and ideological lines. Since this finding rests on data about changes in the attitudes of individuals rather than aggregates, it would not seem consistent with the view that the changes are simply the result of sorting individuals into ideologically homogeneous parties through the polarized policies offered by the parties' candidates.

A comparison of the 1998, 2002, 2004, and 2006 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations surveys of elite and mass attitudes shows an unprecedented level of partisan and ideological polarization on key foreign policy issues across the board, not just Iraq.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 140-1.

<sup>94</sup> Jacobson, *A Divider*, 144, 155-159.

<sup>95</sup> Geoffrey C. Layman and Thomas Carsey, "Party Polarization and 'Conflict Extension' in the American Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (October 2002), 786-802.

<sup>96</sup> The surveys interviewed samples of the American public and a sample of leaders who have foreign policy powers, specialization, or expertise. The leaders include members of Congress or their senior staff, presidential administration officials and senior staff in agencies or offices dealing with foreign policy issues, university administrators or academics who teach in the area of international relations, journalists and editorial staff who handle international news, presidents of large labor unions, business executives of

On several issues, the vectors of change correspond closely to policy leadership by the Bush Administration, suggesting a top-down process of attitude change. The elite surveys show increasing polarization on maintaining superior military power worldwide and on spreading democracy abroad, goals which have become the centerpiece of the neoconservative agenda. In 1998, 31 percent more Republican than Democratic elites thought maintaining superior military power was a “very important” foreign policy goal; this gap rose by 18 points to about 49 percent in 2004. In 1998 and 2002, more Democratic than Republican elites thought democracy promotion was a very important goal, but by 2004, after the Bush Administration increased its stress on democratization as a rationale for the Iraq war and the Bush doctrine, these opinions reversed, with 14 percent more Republican than Democratic leaders holding this view. The Bush Administration stance against the International Criminal Court has also led to an increasing partisan elite divergence, rising from 38 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2004. The gap on this issue between self-identified conservatives versus liberals rose in 2004 to 54 percent. Overall, for the 62 questions asked of elites, we find 17 cases of partisan divergence and six cases of partisan convergence. Ideological divergence and convergence occurred in eleven cases each.

Mass public respondents are somewhat less divided by party but more divided by ideology. Based on responses to 122 questions, Democrats and Republicans diverged more than nine percentage points on 19 questions between 1998 and 2004, and converged on only four questions. Self-identified liberals and conservatives diverged on 23 questions and converged on nine. Partisan divergence emerged on defense spending, foreign military aid, gathering intelligence information about other countries, strengthening the United Nations, combating international terrorism, and maintaining superior military power worldwide. The ideological divergence extends into global environmental issues as well. From 1998 to 2004, the percent of conservatives who thought improving the global environment should be a very important goal of U.S. foreign policy dropped from 47 percent to 33 percent, while liberals held stable at 63 percent. Astonishingly, the percentage of conservatives who saw global warming as a critical threat dropped from 38 percent in 1998 to 22 percent in 2004, whereas a majority of liberals still perceived this as a critical threat. From 2002 to 2004, Republicans moved from 6 percent to 20 percent more likely than Democrats to favor toppling regimes that support terrorist groups.

In sum, there is evidence for increasing partisan and ideological differences among both elites and the public. Partisan polarization has occurred more widely and sharply among elites, whereas ideological divergence is more pronounced among the public. Elite polarization seems directly driven by the policy commitments of the President. Mass-level polarization is harder to interpret. It might reflect a more diffuse impact of Presidential framing of issues through broad ideology rather than through specific policies, but it might also be influenced by unrelated grassroots trends.

In a further effort to assess whether public polarization is mainly responding to Presidential framing or to popular currents of opinion, we conducted a factor analysis to see which issues seem more tightly linked to party, ideology, and each other. We found

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Fortune 1000 corporations, religious leaders, presidents of major private foreign policy organizations, and presidents of major special interest groups relevant to foreign policy. Marshall M. Bouton et al., *Global views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). See also Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon, "Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy." There is a public survey but no elite survey for 2006. The 2006 survey shows a continuation of the trends in the 2004 survey, but we do not present findings based on 2006 here.

that issues that have been central to the President's rhetoric and policy agenda—the Iraq war and tax cuts—were most tightly linked in this way. In contrast, attitudes on issues like the death penalty, which has not been central to the Bush Administration's framing efforts, were more loosely tied to the others. Although the Bush doctrine seems to have failed as an enduring wedge issue for Republican partisan advantage, its polarizing effect may be more long-lived if it has become embedded in Republican grassroots ideology.

*Conclusions: Unipolarity, partisan ideology, and the likelihood of war*

Does unipolarity per se free the United States to use force abroad and thus make war more likely? Hardly. As the United States is learning, an imprudent war can still be costly for a sole superpower. The price tag for the Iraq occupation alone has been projected to exceed a trillion dollars.<sup>97</sup> This is true not only in fact, as they say, but even more important, in theory. According to rational bargaining theories of war, an increase in the power of a hegemonic state should in itself have no effect on the likelihood of war.<sup>98</sup> As long as all actors share common information about the change in power, the states losing relative power should simply give proportionately more concessions in disputes.

If so, the main effect of unipolarity on the likelihood of war, if any, should come from its effects on domestic politics and ideology, which could cause the expectations of the opponents to diverge. Under unipolarity, the immediate, self-evident costs and risks of war are more likely to *seem* manageable, especially for a hegemonic power like the U.S. that commands more military capacity than the rest of the world combined. This does not necessarily make the use of force cheap or wise, but it means that the costs and risks of the use of force are comparatively indirect, long-term, and thus highly subject to interpretation. This interpretive leeway may open the door to domestic political impulses that lead the hegemon to overreach its capabilities. If opponents sense that the hegemon is overplaying a weak hand, this increases the chance that the hegemon will need to fight hard to get its way.

Unipolarity opened a space for interpretation that tempted a highly ideological foreign policy cohort to seize on international terrorism as a wedge issue to transform the balance of power in both the international system and American party politics. This cohort had its hands on the levers of power on September 11, 2001, as a result of three decades of partisan ideological polarization on domestic issues. Their instinctive response to the terrorist attack was grounded in ideological sincerity but also in routine practices of wedge issue politics. From conviction and from tactical habit, successful Republican politicians had learned that polarizing on non-economic issues is a political necessity in a country where most voters want costly welfare-state policies that are at odds with the upper-income tax cuts that are the bread and butter of the Republicans' central constituency. Because unipolarity does not really give a reckless hegemon a free ride, the Bush strategy was only briefly successful as a wedge issue. However, it may have a more lasting effect in deepening the ideological polarization of American party politics.

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<sup>97</sup> Linda Biles and Joseph Stiglitz, "The Economic Costs of the Iraq War," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 12054, February 2006.

<sup>98</sup> James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (summer 1995), 379-414.

Despite the temptations of unipolarity, the intelligence and prudence of democracy is not yet exhausted. The US has not applied its preventive war doctrine to the cases of North Korea and Iran. Although Bush was re-elected in 2004, shifting public views on the war played a central role in the Democratic victory in the 2006 Congressional election. At least among the majority of Democratic and Independent voters, democratic checks on reckless policy are working more or less as the “democratic marketplace of ideas” theory expects. After the 2008 election, America’s interlude of imperial ideology may seem more a passing reaction to September 11 than a reflection of a longer-lasting trend under unipolarity.

**Table 1. Reciprocal effects of party identification and policy opinions**

We used the National Election Study 2000-2002-2004 panel data to explore whether the effect of party identification on policy opinions was greater than the reverse effect. Specifically, to estimate the effect of party id on opinion change from 2002 to 2004, we regressed opinion in 2004 on prior opinion in 2002 and prior party id. To estimate the effect of opinion on party identification change, we regressed party identification in 2004 on prior party identification and prior opinion. Below, based on the magnitudes of the t-values for coefficients of the relevant variables, we see that party more often had a significant effect on opinion change from 2002 to 2004 than the reverse. We found similar results overall for liberal-conservative ideology and policy opinions.

<i>Policy Issue</i>	Effect of Party on Opinion Change (t-value, *p<05)	Effect of Opinion on Party ID Change (t-value, *p<05)
Affirmative action	2.36*	0.95
Equal pay for women	3.70*	0.62
Social security spending	2.39*	0.67
“Welfare” spending	3.33*	1.79
Child care spending	2.97*	0.18
Aid to poor people	2.92*	1.25
Aid to working poor	0.42	0.50
Aid to blacks	2.65*	0.13
Public school aid	2.43*	0.35
Big city school aid	1.08	1.72
Early education aid	0.74	0.03
Crime spending	0.40	0.20
Aids research spending	1.99*	1.11
Environmental protection Spending	4.03*	0.53
Foreign aid spending	0.05	0.81
Defense spending	1.50	1.26
Homeland security spending	2.35*	1.64
War on terror spending	2.20*	1.31
Border security spending	3.40*	2.89*
Tax cut	9.18*	2.35*
Foreign policy—stay home?	3.96*	1.38
Afghanistan—worth cost?	8.44*	1.11