From Moral Panic to Permanent War: Rhetoric and the Road to Invading Iraq

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From Moral Panic to Permanent War:
Rhetoric and the Road to Invading Iraq

By Kai Philippe
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Introduction

Research Question

This thesis seeks to understand the conditions in the United States post-9/11 that enabled the Bush administration to pursue a wide-ranging and all-encompassing “War on Terror,” with substantial support from the general public. I am principally focused on two significant facets of the War on Terror: the invasion of Iraq and the establishment of a permanent security state (and the interrelated creation of a new state of exception). I ask why the George W. Bush administration was so successful in generating support for both the invasion and occupation of Iraq and for policies that violated fundamental civil liberties— civil liberties generally considered to be of great value in American society.

I argue that the Bush administration, with substantial collaboration from mainstream mass media, was able to effectively instigate a moral panic— a panic about both the threat posed by Iraq to the US and about the threat posed by the broad specter of “terrorism” to the US and the “free world.” The fact that the Bush administration was so easily able to foment such a panic often goes ignored, but can be explained by the pre-existing widespread belief in American exceptionalism, as well as the prevalence of deeply rooted colonialist ideology, among the general public. Relatedly, I assert that the post-9/11 moment, including both the cultural reaction to the attacks and post-9/11 foreign policy, cannot be understood without first examining the significant political and cultural shifts that took place during and after the Cold War, among both the general public and among political elites.

I then argue that this moral panic, which was actively cultivated by the Bush administration and many fixtures in the media, enabled Bush to implement policies and practices that violated domestic and/or international law with minimal backlash from the American public,
and in many cases, even received enthusiastic support. These policies and practices established, and then further entrenched, a permanent state of exception centered principally around national security, or perhaps more accurately, “homeland security;” the purported need to immediately secure the homeland allowed for what Giorgio Agamben (2005) calls the “suspension of the juridical order itself.”

Research Methods

In order to answer this question, I draw upon a variety of scholarly sources that explore topics ranging from the political moment in which 9/11 occurred to the history of American exceptionalism to the evolution of US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. I also examine a number of primary documents, including addresses to the public made by President Bush and other members of his cabinet, news conferences, interviews, as well as policy documents like the 2002 National Security Strategy and the Military Order of November 13, 2001. I utilize documents explicitly intended for a broad audience to gain a sense of what kind of messages were conveyed to the general American public by the Bush administration about topics related to 9/11, terrorism, and Iraq.

In contrast, I rely on policy documents in order to understand the actual political objectives and foreign policy ideals of the Bush administration. I also use internal government memos, reports, and proposals that have been summarized and/or compiled by the National Security Archive; these documents were, by and large, obtained by the National Security Archive via the U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and/or were leaked or declassified. These documents provide insight into the true intentions of the Bush administration, as well as what kind of information was kept hidden from the American public. Lastly, I employ public opinion

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polls from *Gallup* and the *Pew Research Center* to show changing levels of support for the Iraq War, support for various policies instituted by the Bush administration, and the prevalence of certain beliefs, in particular as relates to American exceptionalism.

Looking Forward

In the first chapter, I provide theoretical background, highlighting the predominant narratives surrounding 9/11 and the War on Terror, summarizing the core pieces of scholarly literature I have interacted with, and outlining the key concepts essential to understanding my thesis’ argument. These key concepts are “American exceptionalism,” “moral panic,” and “state of exception;” all three of these concepts are explored and assessed in great depth in subsequent chapters. I also use the first chapter as a space to articulate and clarify the scope of the thesis.

The second chapter is principally concerned with American exceptionalism and the historical context I believe necessary for fully understanding the War on Terror. I explain the origins of American exceptionalism, giving a brief history of how it has informed US foreign policy, as well as how it, i.e., rhetoric rooted in American exceptionalism, has been invoked by past US presidents. The second chapter also addresses major shifts that occurred in US foreign policy, as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, and the related development of neoconservatism in the 1990s. US foreign policy during the Cold War is not discussed in any depth, but I do direct some attention to the US interventionism and imperialism that took place in Latin America in the second half of the 20th century.

In the third chapter, I provide evidence of the Bush administration’s efforts to generate a moral panic in the wake of 9/11, highlighting the participation of mainstream mass media in these efforts as well. I focus in particular on the language used by Bush that I see as being rooted in American exceptionalism and colonialist ideology— language that is used to describe Osama
bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and the threat of terrorism more broadly. I also assess the Bush administration’s campaign to convince the American public that Saddam Hussein was in possession of weapons of mass destruction.

Lastly, the fourth and final chapter explores one of the major consequences of the moral panic that was fomented: the new state of exception that was initiated, and then made permanent. I discuss several different policies that I assert constitute this state of exception—policies that, by and large, defy core civil liberties and/or violate established domestic and international law. I examine public support for these policies in addition, arguing that the successful provocation of a moral panic significantly contributed to the substantial public approval of these policies that has been witnessed.

Theoretical Background

Introduction

Just over eighteen months after the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 (referred to from here on out as “9/11”), the United States invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. The weekend following the invasion, 72% of Americans supported the war in Iraq, according to a Gallup poll.2 Around this same time, 73% of Americans also expressed a belief that US action in Iraq was “morally justified.”3 Five years later, 63% of Americans said that the US had “made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq;” as of 2019, this number of Americans who feel this way stands at 50%.4 At its core, my thesis seeks to explain why so many Americans, from differing

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4 Ibid.
political persuasions, supported the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and how this support was affected by the events of 9/11 and its framing by political elites and mass media.

In many ways, in the US, there is a common understanding of 9/11 and the place it holds in American collective memory. This is not to say, of course, that 9/11 and its aftermath have been experienced and conceptualized by every American in the same way, but rather that there is a dominant narrative surrounding 9/11 that largely goes unquestioned. A fundamental component of this narrative is the belief that the events of 9/11 themselves, i.e., the acts of terrorism that were committed, triggered a major, irreversible shift in American politics and society. Liane Tanguay (2012) writes that 9/11 has been labeled as “the end of ‘the end of history,’” i.e., “a cataclysm the “before” and “after” of which would remain forever distinct in cultural memory.”

However, many have failed to acknowledge how certain meanings have been imposed on 9/11, or in other words, how the meaning of 9/11 was decided by powerful actors in American society in order to successfully achieve their social, political, and economic objectives. For example, Eli Jelly-Schapiro (2018) describes 9/11 as having presented the Bush administration and its allies with “an opportunity not only to institute particular policies, but to compose a vocabulary and narrative that would guide U.S. global supremacy in the coming decades— that would herald not the end of history, but its urgent beginning.”

Essentially, it was in Bush’s political interest to craft and propagate a very specific narrative surrounding the significance of 9/11, and more specifically, surrounding the significance of 9/11 for American society as that significance influences the way the US interacts with the rest of the world. Thus, we must not automatically assume that 9/11 is intrinsically a historical rupture; instead we should seek to

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determine the ways in which 9/11 was manipulated for political motives. That is the starting point of this paper.

This paper is specifically concerned with the relationship between the framing of 9/11 and the Iraq War, in particular how the framing of 9/11 influenced public support for invading Iraq. My focus is largely domestic, and as such, the war in itself (on the ground in Iraq) is not explored in great depth. Instead, the focal point is the lead-up to the invasion, as well as policies instituted in the US—policies that relate to the establishment of a homeland security-based state of exception.

Importantly, the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq cannot be properly understood or contextualized without first assessing the political moment in which 9/11 occurred, and the major historical moments and trends that informed the US’s response to 9/11. I argue that the Bush administration utilized rhetoric rooted in colonialist ideology such as “us vs. them” and “civilized vs. barbarian” to fuel a moral panic in the wake of 9/11 and ultimately obtain substantial public support for invading Iraq. Additionally, the Bush administration exploited the widespread belief in American exceptionalism in order to successfully portray the invasion (and occupation) of Iraq as a humanitarian intervention, intent on liberating an oppressed people and spreading liberal ideas of democracy and freedom. In other words, because of shifting societal norms against (overt) practices of colonialism and imperialism, evidenced in part by the backlash to blatant imperialist aggression by the US during the Vietnam War, the Bush administration carefully employed language that simultaneously obscured the actual intentions behind invading Iraq and appealed to mainstream liberal values.

I will also argue that 9/11 was strategically presented as a major historical rupture, the end of “the end of history,” so to speak, as mentioned above by Tanguay. This framing
legitimized the need for a state of exception/state of emergency; the idea that the US was in an ongoing state of emergency would become a defining feature of, and a major justification for, the broader War on Terror. Essentially, a significant portion of the American public supported policies that under “normal” circumstances they would have rejected on the grounds that they violate fundamental constitutional rights, in large part due to a politics of fear facilitated by the Bush administration and mass media in which “the enemy” is defined in terms both vague and broad, as well as racialized in such a way that invokes white supremacist, colonialist ideology.

This thesis is concerned with the response to, and conceptualization of, 9/11 by both political elites and the general public. The relationship between the two groups is complicated, generally speaking, and specifically in the post-9/11 context, and we must thus be careful not to oversimplify it. The widespread support we see for the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and for the entrenchment of a state of exception cannot be understood as simply the result of elite manipulation. Rather, we must acknowledge that there is a shared ideology between political elites and the general population that is operating here— an ideology that becomes particularly potent during political crises. This shared ideology has several different dimensions, but is principally composed of colonialist views about who is and isn’t “civilized,” and American exceptionalist beliefs, most prominently the belief that the US is an exceptional (and superior) country in every respect (including morally), and thus should play a uniquely large role on the international stage.

There is a fairly common narrative surrounding the War on Terror, and in particular surrounding the Iraq War, that a small group composed of Bush, Cheney, and their neocon cronies, masterminded an evil plot to deliberately mislead and manipulate the American public, in order to achieve their neoimperialist ambitions of perpetual US hegemony. There are certainly
aspects of this narrative that are true, but it is also overly simplistic, and to a certain extent, denies the general public their agency, and ignores the impact of broader sociopolitical shifts that took place at the end of the Cold War.

This paper does not seek to address the reasons behind the War in Afghanistan nor the war’s implications. The reason why the War in Afghanistan is not explored here is not because I think it was an appropriate or logical or moral response to 9/11 (I do not think it was any of those things), but rather because it does not provide the same utility as a case study that the Iraq War does; this is because there was absolutely zero connection between Iraq and 9/11, whereas Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were indeed operating in Afghanistan. Thus, Iraq is an extreme case in this regard, making it particularly useful to analyze. That being said, it is important to acknowledge that there are many similarities between the two wars, particularly in regards to the ways they were portrayed and marketed by the Bush administration and mainstream mass media; both wars, for example, were purported to have great humanitarian aims.

Literature Review

A wide range of scholarly literature, both within and beyond the discipline of International Relations, has been published regarding the buildup to the invasion of Iraq following 9/11. In particular, many scholars have sought to explain why the US (the government, mass media, and the general public) responded the way it did to 9/11, specifically focusing on the reasons behind substantial public support for invading Iraq, despite Iraq’s clear lack of involvement in the 9/11 attacks. A prominent lens through which scholars have examined the Bush administration's effort to gain public support for invading Iraq is what I term the “moral panic lens;” scholars who operate from this lens argue that the Bush administration intentionally made efforts to define Saddam Hussein as a threat to the US in order to provoke fear and
paranoia among the general public, and thus engender support for invading Iraq, despite their own understanding that Saddam Hussein did not actually pose a substantial threat.

One such scholar is criminologist Scott Bonn. Bonn (2010) primarily uses critical communication theory in order to make his argument, a highly interdisciplinary framework that weaves together critical sociology, critical criminology, communication theory, and social constructionism. He argues that, in the wake of 9/11, the Bush administration, with enthusiastic support and participation from mainstream mass media, deliberately engineered and fueled a moral panic in order to form a link between Saddam Hussein/Iraq and 9/11 in the public imagination, and ultimately obtain public support for invading Iraq.7

Gershon Shafir & Cynthia E. Schairer (2012) also adopt the moral panic lens, outlining the characteristics of political moral panics broadly speaking, as well as what makes the War on Terror in particular a political moral panic. Shafir & Schairer indirectly tie political moral panics to states of exception, i.e., situations where the rule of law is suspended in the name of the public well-being, arguing that political moral panics “provide opportunity…for side-stepping traditional political channels and…feature an atmosphere of permissive lawlessness.”8 They devote much time to discussing the Bush administration's redefining of suspected terrorists as “unlawful enemy combatants;” in later chapters, I will point to the creation of the legal category of “unlawful enemy combatant” as a prime example of the existence of a state of exception in the post 9/11 era. Both Bonn and Shafir & Schairer draw heavily on the theories of the sociologist and criminologist Stanley Cohen.

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Bonn’s theory of moral panic in particular heavily informs my argument, especially in the sense that like Bonn, I propose that Bush, along with mainstream mass media, deliberately fomented a moral panic in order to gain support for invading Iraq from the American public. What Bonn fails to explain, however, is why the Bush administration was so successful in fomenting said moral panic. I argue that a longstanding history of American exceptionalism, and widespread belief in it at the time of 9/11, created the conditions for a moral panic to form (and spread), and can explain the effectiveness of Bush’s efforts to manipulate the American public. I further extend this argument by contending that the Bush administration exploited the widespread belief in American exceptionalism in order to successfully portray the invasion (and occupation) of Iraq as a humanitarian intervention, intent on liberating an oppressed people and spreading liberal ideas of democracy and freedom. Essentially, while Bonn raises important points about the post-9/11 moment in regards to the state of mass fear that existed, his theory is not overly useful for understanding why people panicked to such an extent in the first place, and why that panic translated into support for war with Iraq and for extralegal and/or unconstitutional policies.

Several other scholars, such as Robert G. Patman (2006), Joanne Esch (2010), and Andrew Rojecki (2008) have explored public support for the War in Iraq more through the lens of American exceptionalism. These scholars have examined in depth the historical roots of American exceptionalism, in particular pointing to the ways it has been influenced/informed by colonialist ideology and dominant strands of Protestantism. Esch, for example, links the us vs. them language used by Bush post-9/11 to both the colonialist dichotomy of civilized vs. barbaric and to American exceptionalist notions that the US is the ultimate arbiter (and symbol) of
civilization and that the US is always a force for good in the world. I thus draw from Esch by arguing that the dominant narrative advocating for war in Iraq not only represented an embrace of American exceptionalism, but also signified a sort of re-legitimization of overt colonialism.

Eli Jelly-Schapiro (2018) also discusses American exceptionalism, but primarily as part of a broader analysis of the state of exception, and more specifically its inextricable connections to colonial governance. Perhaps most importantly, Jelly-Schapiro rejects the idea of the War on Terror as historical rupture, setting him apart from many of the other theorists on the subject. He asserts that “the contemporary iteration of emergency governance is not…exceptional but proves …the rule” and that the policies that were enacted after 9/11 and are commonly viewed as “exceptional,” are, in reality “contiguous with the longer history of modernity’s exceptional violence.” In other words, practices like arbitrarily detaining people or classifying suspected terrorists as “unlawful enemy combatants” are, for Jelly-Schapiro, simply part and parcel of the broader security project that originated several centuries earlier with settler colonialism.

Importantly, following from Jelly-Schapiro, I link both American exceptionalism and the state of exception to colonialism. More specifically, in the case of the latter, I assert that creating a state of exception has long been a tool of colonizer states, and thus it is not necessarily the imposition of a state of exception in the wake of 9/11 that is unique, but rather the permanent, unending nature of said state of exception. However, I do differ a bit from Jelly-Schapiro in that while I do not view the governmental response to 9/11 as a complete historical rupture, I do believe there are aspects of the post-9/11 state of exception that are unique, specifically in their permanence and their more overt and open embrace of certain illiberal practices. Jelly-Schapiro

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11 Ibid.
also fails to address the role of the general public, particularly in regards to public support for these kinds of policies.

Another scholar I draw from is Margaret Denike (2008) who approaches the post-9/11 era in a somewhat similar fashion to Jelly-Schapiro, highlighting the colonialist roots of both the War on Terror and of security states more generally. That being said, Denike’s analysis is more focused on the ways that security states interact with international law, especially as pertains to human rights and just war doctrine. Denike suggests that powerful states in the West like the US often use human rights abuses perpetrated (or claimed to be perpetrated) in countries in the Global South as justification for “intervening” in those countries. Humanitarian intervention then harkens back to the colonialist dichotomy of civilized vs. barbaric, with colonization in the name of “civilizing” the “barbaric” being replaced with imperialist invasion in the name of liberating an oppressed people. Helen Dexter (2008) also discusses just war doctrine, arguing that it had a sort of reemergence in the post-Cold War era; notably, she explores this reemergence by analyzing both cosmopolitanism and neoconservatism, in particular their convergence as pertains to humanitarian intervention.

Definitions

The concepts of American exceptionalism, moral panic, and state of exception will be explored in depth in their respective chapters, but in order to understand the core claims of this paper, it is necessary to define and discuss each of them here in brief first. American exceptionalism has a long and complicated history, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed account of its emergence; for the purpose of this thesis, I will principally be


focusing on its ties to colonialist ideology, its espousal of a good vs. evil narrative, and its use and deployment in major foreign policy endeavors.

American exceptionalism, its origins, and its historical iterations are vital to understand for this paper as, at the core of my argument is the claim that pervasive belief in American exceptionalism among the general public was a major contributing factor to support for invading Iraq. Likewise, as mentioned repeatedly, the Bush administration utilized rhetoric rooted in American exceptionalist ideology in various forms of address to the general public in order to both gain support for the Iraq War, and to portray the war as legitimate and just.

Patman (2006) defines American exceptionalism as “an informal ideology that endows Americans with a pervasive faith in the uniqueness, immutability and superiority of the country's founding liberal principles, and...with the conviction that the USA has a special destiny among nations.” McCrisken (2009) identifies several core beliefs he sees as being fundamental to American exceptionalism, most notably that the US was “chosen by Providence to play a special role in human history,” that American values hold mass appeal and should be applied universally, that the US is the epitome of human progress and civilization, and should thus serve as a model for the rest of the world, and that the US is inherently “a force for good,” such that American foreign policy must, by extension, be of an intrinsically benevolent nature. Crucially, American exceptionalism is rooted in both Christianity (particularly Protestantism) and nationalism, and to this day, retains strong religious and patriotic undertones.

Esch (2010) characterizes American exceptionalism as a political myth, drawing from Bottici & Challand (2006) who define a political myth as “a common narrative by which the

members of a social group can provide significance to their political conditions and experience.”\textsuperscript{16} Importantly, the extent to which a political myth is adopted by a particular social group is not dependent on how plausible the myth is, but rather on how effective said myth is at providing a coherent narrative that speaks to the collective identity of that group.\textsuperscript{17}

Belief in American exceptionalism has long had tremendous influence on United States foreign policy. McCrisken points to two primary historical forms of American exceptionalist belief, the “exemplary” and the “missionary.”\textsuperscript{18} While both forms conceptualize the US as a unique and extraordinary nation that all other nations should aspire to be more like, followers of the first form adopt a more internal focus whereas followers of the latter believe that the US should actively promote, and in many cases, impose its ideology and agenda on other nations.\textsuperscript{19} Neoconservatism can be seen as a rather infamous outgrowth or iteration of the missionary strand of American exception. For clarity, I am defining neoconservatism (in the foreign policy sense) as the belief that the US should use military power to pursue its interests on the global stage, that US interests are inherently moral and for the betterment of mankind, and that the American model of liberal capitalism should be universally adopted. Neoconservatism is of substantial relevance to this paper, as much of Bush’s administration, including Bush himself, were (or purported themselves to be) ardent believers in neoconservatism. As such, neoconservatism is commonly seen as having played a major role in the decision to invade and occupy Iraq.

As mentioned earlier, for the purposes of this paper, I am primarily relying on Bonn’s definition of moral panic which is as follows: “a condition or situation in which public fears and

\textsuperscript{17} Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 364.
\textsuperscript{18} McCrisken, “George W. Bush,” 182
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
state interventions greatly exceed the objective threat posed to society by a particular group that is claimed to be responsible for the condition.”

Bonn identifies five distinct groups of “social actors” that generally play a prominent role in moral panics: folk devils, rule or law enforcers, the media, politicians, and the public. The term folk devils is applied to the individuals or group(s) who are purported to constitute a threat to broader society.

In the case of post-9/11 moral panic, I believe there are several diverse groups and individuals that can be seen as folk devils, most notably Saddam Hussein, the “axis of evil” of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, and Muslims (or those assumed be Muslim). Folk devils, as emphasized by Bonn, do not “necessarily exist objectively,” and instead are often manufactured by powerful actors like politicians and mass media. Relatedly, Bonn specifies that the post-9/11 moral panic was “elite-engineered;” moral panics are elite-engineered when they are the result of a campaign perpetrated by elites in order to intentionally provoke fear among the masses, usually surrounding a threat/issue that the elites themselves are not overly concerned about. As such, the folk devils listed above are also elite-engineered. I am primarily concerned with the relationship(s) between two of these social actors, i.e., politicians and the public, but the three other actors will all be discussed as well, to a lesser extent.

Lastly, Bonn asserts that there are five criteria a situation must meet in order to qualify as a moral panic: concern, consensus, hostility, disproportionality, and volatility. He argues, as I do, that the leadup to the Iraq War meets all five of these criteria; I will not provide detailed explanations for why I believe the post-9/11 moment meets each specific criterium, but rather I

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20 Bonn, *Mass Deception*, 5
21 Bonn, *Mass Deception*, 7
22 Ibid.
23 Bonn, *Mass Deception*, 29
24 Bonn, *Mass Deception*, 8
25 Bonn, *Mass Deception*, 81
expect that the evidence I employ from a range primary documents such as newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, presidential radio addresses and other speeches to the general public, executive orders, directives to Congress, and internal memos will speak for itself.

I connect the concepts of American exceptionalism and moral panic by asserting that Bush’s employment of American exceptionalist rhetoric resulted in a moral panic, which then ultimately resulted in substantial support for invading Iraq. Crucially, the resulting moral panic enabled not only the US government to claim some sort of legitimacy in going to war in Iraq, but also enabled it to establish a state of exception.

The state of exception is also central to this paper, but is a markedly more abstract concept as compared to both American exceptionalism and moral panic. I use the term “state of exception” to refer to moments when normal rule of law is suspended by the State, avowedly for the well-being of the state’s citizens. Giorgio Agamben (2005) and Achille Mbembe (2019) are two noteworthy scholars who have written at great length on the state of exception and inform my paper. Agamben does not offer a straightforward definition of the state of exception, noting the concept’s “uncertainty;” he instead writes that “the state of exception is not a special kind of law… rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law’s threshold or limit concept.”26 Notably, he refers to the state of exception as the “dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics.”27 Mbembe is more concerned with the state of exception as it connects to his theory of necropolitics, and links the state of exception to colonialism and race in ways that are useful for this paper. Mbembe’s declaration that “the colony is…the site par excellence where controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where

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the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization.’” has significant implications for my analysis of the post-9/11 state of exception, and will be further examined later on.28

Looking Forward

In the following chapter, I provide historical background I view as necessary to properly understand the political moment in which 9/11 occurred. I primarily focus on major political ideologies that gained prominence during, and after, the Cold War, including both neoliberalism and neoconservatism. In the following chapter, I will also briefly outline the origins and history of American exceptionalism, focusing especially on its relationship to Christianity and the founding of the US. I also explore how American exceptionalism has shown up in past foreign policy decisions, as well as how American exceptionalism (and belief in it) has evolved over time.

I am particularly interested in how belief in American exceptionalism changed during and after both the Vietnam War and the Cold War. The Vietnam War is relevant as I believe the backlash to the war that eventually ensued represents a rejection of the idea that the US always acts as a force for good in the world, and signified a partial societal shift against engagement in overt imperialism. Neoconservative ideas surrounding intervention and just war are also a crucial part of this paper; I make the claim that neoconservative support for humanitarian intervention (and neoconservative ideology as a whole) was largely a way to get around shifting societal norms and appeal to Americans who would not have normally supported more imperialist-style interventions.

American Exceptionalism & Historical Background

There is ample evidence to suggest that the majority of Americans, continuing up until (and through) the present day, very much believe in American exceptionalism. A 2010 poll performed by Gallup found that 80% of Americans (73% of Democrats and 91% of Republicans) think that “the U.S. has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world.”\(^{29}\) The same poll revealed that two thirds of Americans believe that the US has “a special responsibility to be the leading nation in world affairs.”\(^{30}\)

In 2017, the Pew Research Center asked survey respondents to select the statement that most accurately describes their opinion of the US: “U.S. stands above all other countries in the world,” “U.S. one of the greatest countries, along with others,” or “There are other countries that are better than the U.S.”\(^{31}\) Nearly a third (29%) of Americans chose the first statement, with the majority (56%) choosing the second one.\(^{32}\) Only 14% of those surveyed expressed a belief that “there are other countries that are better than the U.S.”\(^{33}\) This is, however, a bit of a shift from six years prior, when less than 10% of Americans (8%) selected the third statement, and when nearly 40% (38%) selected the first.\(^{34}\)

Notably, pride in being American also rose substantially in the wake of 9/11. In June 2003, nearly two years after 9/11, and three months after the start of the Iraq War, 70% of

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\(^{30}\) Ibid.


\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
respondents to a *Gallup* poll reported that they were “extremely” proud to be American, with another 20% claiming to be “very” proud.\(^{35}\)

*The History of American Exceptionalist Rhetoric*

Overt American exceptionalist rhetoric has been employed by a diverse range of US presidents. In particular, many American presidents – John Adams, Andrew Jackson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan, to name just a few – have made reference to the notion that the US was chosen by God to have a unique mission and role in the world, using terms like “providence” and “destiny” to describe the origins of the US’s “calling.”\(^{36}\) This understanding of the US stems back to, and was firmly cemented in, *The Declaration of Independence*, in which the colonies asserted their right to “separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.”\(^{37}\) The authors of *The Declaration of Independence* also described the document as having been formulated “with firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.”\(^{38}\) John Winthrop, a major player in the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who also served as one of the colony’s early governors, famously declared “For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”\(^{39}\) Many early Puritan settlers in the US had a similar line of thinking to Winthrop, staunchly believing that God had chosen “the ’newfound’ land that would eventually be called America to be a ‘redeemer nation.’”\(^{40}\)

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\(^{36}\) Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 368.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.


\(^{40}\) Gilmore, “Translating American Exceptionalism,” 2421.
These quotations not only exemplify the idea that will later come to dominate American political discourse, namely that the US should serve as a model for all the rest of the world, but also provide evidence for the Puritan roots of American exceptionalism. Thus there are significant religious undertones to American exceptionalism as an ideology, and in some respects, American exceptionalism can be seen as a rather strange blending of Protestantism (especially Puritanism), nationalism, and Enlightenment ideals. Esch, for example, describes American exceptionalism as a “religious-turned-nationalist mentality” and as “apocalyptic.” Rojecki writes that American exceptionalist values “marry Enlightenment ideals of individual reason and liberty with religious and moral views uprooted from their origins in Puritan piety.”

*American Exceptionalism & The Cold War: From Vietnam to Guatemala*

American exceptionalism relies on the idea of a clearly-defined enemy. In order for the US to be a nation that is uniquely great, there must be some other country that is uniquely terrible. We can see this kind of rhetoric having played an especially prominent role during the Cold War. Jelly-Schapiro writes that, “the security of identity existed alongside economic security and military security as an urgent National Security concern.” This securitizing of identity translated into more clearly defining what American identity is in the first place, as well as a more rigorous policing of the “borders” of American identity. In other words, the Cold War era signified a heightened need for a universal understanding of what is “American,” and equally important, what is “un-American.” Jelly-Schapiro sees this all as being couched in the rhetoric of security, with that which is “American” needing to be secured, and that which is “un-American” being a threat to (American) security. In this context, American values are “freedom,

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capitalism, individualism” and “totalitarianism, communism, collectivism” are the threats. One major implication of placing identity at the center of the Cold War-era national security narrative was that it enabled a simplistic understanding of the conflict between the US and the Soviet Union, essentially encouraging the American public to ignore and disregard concrete economic and political reasons for the conflict. It thus became easy for the US government to portray the Soviet Union, and communism more broadly, as “irrational and degenerate,” to a certain degree positing the Soviet Union as the barbaric enemy of the civilized US, and as such, revitalizing the traditional colonialist dichotomy.

Importantly, American exceptionalism also positions the US as the “primary defender of civilization.” More specifically, American exceptionalists understand the US as being in a battle against that which it is defending civilization from, namely barbarism. The idea of civilization vs. barbarism is thus essential to American exceptionalist ideology and one of the most prominent iterations of an us vs. them dichotomy, a dichotomy which has historically been regularly invoked by the US government, and becomes especially central during the War on Terror. Esch notes that us vs. them narratives tend to have strong appeal because they favor “cultural and civilizational explanations for conflict over political or economic ones.” As such, employing this type of narrative can be a highly strategic maneuver for politicians, given that it encourages the general populace to blame some sort of outside force (the “them”) rather than question past decisions made by their own government.

The Vietnam War, in many respects, can be seen as a major setback for American exceptionalism, and as such, it signaled to US political and military elites that a shift in military

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45 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 31.
46 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 31.
strategy, as well as a shift in the way war was portrayed to the public, would be necessary. Post-Vietnam, the US increasingly turned to “low-intensity” warfare in what Jelly-Schapiro describes as “a strategic shift toward conflicts waged out of the public glare, often without explicit legislative authorization, and through the funding of proxy forces.” The US had first started employing low-intensity warfare at the start of the Cold War, but the immense political utility of it arguably did not become fully clear until after the Vietnam War. Notably, low-intensity warfare involves heavy reliance on outsourcing, and thus increased collaboration between state and non-state actors. Greg Grandin (2006) describes the US, in the aftermath of Vietnam, as having “relearned…to farm out its imperial violence.”

During the Cold War, the US primarily engaged in low intensity warfare in Central America, with countries like Guatemala and El Salvador becoming sites of horrific violence perpetrated and/or sponsored by the US government and military. One of the primary motivations for US involvement in Central America was to stop potential “regional emulations of the Cuban Revolution,” and relatedly, to “make the world safe for capitalism.” This means that any resistance to adopting various market reforms and a capitalist economic system was met with brutal repression that often included the employment of terrorist tactics by security and/or paramilitary forces. Grandin characterizes the 1960s as an era in which Latin America and Southeast Asia “functioned as the two primary campuses for counterinsurgents;” he notes that the U.S. advisor John Longan who created the first death squad in Guatemala, frequently traveled back and forth between Guatemala and Thailand, “applying insights and fine-tuning

49 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 58.
51 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 57.
52 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 57.
tactics.” Post-Vietnam, leftist guerilla movements grew in Guatemala and El Salvador in particular, leading the US government to respond by funding and arming ruthless right-wing counterinsurgent regimes in both countries. The backing and arming of death squads was, according to the US government, part of a broader strategy of what they referred to rather euphemistically as “counterterror.” Both “counterinsurgency” and “counterterrorism” are terms that are employed with increasing frequency after 9/11, and in particular, during the occupation of Iraq.

Interestingly, US involvement in Latin American, and in particular in Central America, during the second half of the twentieth century, and most intensely during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, can be seen as an eerie precursor to twenty-first century wars in the Middle East. Grandin strikingly describes Reagan’s actions in Central America as “a dress rehearsal for what is going on now in the Middle East.” Through his actions in Central America, Reagan was able to build a broad and powerful right-wing political coalition that remains highly influential to this day; this coalition was particularly successful in permanently affixing US foreign policy with a moral dimension.

Grandin claims that there are three principal elements that “give today’s imperialism its moral force: punitive idealism, free-market absolutism, and right-wing Christian mobilization.” The implementation of these elements in conjunction with one another was primarily facilitated by the bringing together of neoconservatives (often secular) and Christian evangelicals (via Reagan’s foreign policy in Central America) in a way that both heavily influenced American

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53 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 117
54 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 107
55 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 117
56 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 18
57 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 20
58 Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 20
support for the Iraq War and permanently transformed American foreign policy. Grandin writes that both groups “came to share a crisis-ridden view of the world and a sense that America was in decline” and that they “shared a belief that decline could be reversed through a restoration of moral clarity and authority and a recognition that evil existed in the world.”\(^59\) Both groups were profoundly affected by the Vietnam War as well, with prominent evangelicals like Jerry Falwell asserting that the US’ loss in Vietnam was a moment in which the US “stood at the precipice of spiritual collapse.”\(^60\)

As noted earlier, for the US government, one of the main takeaways from the disaster of the Vietnam War was that military actions and wars would need to be presented differently to the American public. Naturally, this necessitates a transformation in government-media relations. Grandin writes that in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, “Defense strategists…concluded that…journalists had become too independent in developing their own channels of information.”\(^61\) To correct this, the CIA and the Pentagon began providing certain journalists with higher levels of access in Central America, pioneering the embedding of journalists with US armed forces that would occur in Iraq.\(^62\)

*Neoconservatism*

US involvement and intervention in Latin America may seem largely disconnected or irrelevant to this paper. However, by looking at the history of the US’s foreign policy towards Latin America, especially during the Cold War, we are able to not only see major continuities in US foreign policy, but also understand better the origins of neoconservatism. Neoconservatism is commonly understood as a post-Cold War ideology. It is true that, in many respects,

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\(^59\) Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 264  
\(^60\) Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 168  
\(^61\) Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 157  
\(^62\) Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 157
neoconservative foreign policy was expressly designed to respond to the US’s newfound status as the only superpower in the world. However, the core tenets of neoconservatism did not suddenly emerge when the Soviet Union fell; they had already been in practice.

American exceptionalist justification for war usually entails claims that the US is liberating some sort of oppressed group. In this way, it is unsurprising that World War II is often looked back upon so fondly by many Americans. Esch argues that World War II has been “well established in the American Psyche as history's most just and necessary war, as ‘The Good War.’” 63 The Vietnam War, on the other hand, became exceedingly difficult to present as having liberatory aspirations. In later chapters, I will present a number of examples of members of the Bush administration comparing the War in Iraq, and the War on Terror more broadly, to World War II, and clearly distinguishing it from the Vietnam War; this is yet another indication of the fact that World War II and the Vietnam War are conceptualized in opposite ways in American collective memory.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I identify neoconservatism as an outgrowth of the missionary strand of American exceptionalism. To reiterate, missionary American exceptionalists believe that the US has “a right and a duty to take an active role in world affairs in order to promote its agenda and objectives.” 64 They do not necessarily seek to obscure the fact that this “active role” is in pursuit of US interests, i.e., selfishly motivated, but do, however, assert that US interests are inherently benevolent, and thus beneficial to all of humankind. 65 Missionary American exceptionalist ideology has been at the core of a number of historic foreign policy endeavors and eras; manifest destiny and Westward expansion, imperialism in the late

19th and early 20th centuries, Wilsonianism and liberal internationalism, internationalism during World War II, and “free world leadership” during the Cold War are a few prominent examples.\textsuperscript{66}

Thus, neoconservatism is simply one strand of missionary American exceptionalist belief. There is a long history of public support for missionary American exceptionalism and the idea that the US should take an active leadership role in global affairs. Less than two years after the end of World War II, on March 12, 1947, President Truman gave a speech to the US Congress in which he simultaneously “outlined his vision for a new American foreign policy” and essentially inaugurated the Cold War, declaring that the US would assist any country battling a communist threat (internal or external), and that by extension, the US would need to play a larger, more active role in international affairs.\textsuperscript{67} Truman asserted, “The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world.”\textsuperscript{68} Soon after his speech, Truman’s approval rating sharply increased to 63%; only two months before, his approval rating had only been 48%.\textsuperscript{69}

Essentially, neoconservatism as a political doctrine does not hold any appeal to those without a preexisting firmly-held belief in the unique and exceptional nature of the US. Neoconservative foreign policy is centered around the idea that the US can and should act unilaterally if necessary to preserve its interests. Neoconservatives are also fairly explicit about their desire to establish US hegemony on a global scale. However, they couch this desire in language surrounding morality. This allows neoconservatives to represent their foreign policy not as a wish to achieve imperialist domination but rather as an altruistic mission to give everyone

\textsuperscript{66} McCrisken, “George W. Bush,” 183.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
the opportunity to experience firsthand the marvels of American democracy and free-market capitalism.

Several years after the end of the Cold War, during the second term of Bill Clinton’s presidency, a group of republicans formed the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a neconservative think tank. Many of the key founding members would later serve in the George W. Bush administration, and play a significant role in crafting Bush’s foreign policy; most notably this includes Bush’s vice president Dick Cheney, Bush’s secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Bush’s deputy secretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz. The PNAC first began calling for regime change in Iraq in the mid-to-late 1990s, eventually writing a letter to then-president Clinton in 1998, outlining the dangers Saddam Hussein would present if he became able to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

Much of the PNAC’s foreign policy ideals were inspired by what is often referred to as the “Wolfowitz Doctrine,” a Defense Planning Guidance document that was drafted by Paul Wolfowitz at the end of George H.W. Bush’s term and leaked to The New York Times in March, 1992. The Wolfowitz Doctrine was principally concerned with what the role of the US should be on the global stage in the post-Cold War era, and advocated that the US’s primary objective should be to preserve its status as the only superpower in a newly unipolar world; one of the most significant and influential aspects of the Wolfowitz Doctrine was its assertion that the US can and should use preemptive military force when necessary for status preservation.

PNAC was highly critical of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy, particularly in the realm of defense, labeling the 1990s as “a decade of defense neglect,” and arguing that it

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70 Patman, “Globalisation,” 971.
71 Patman, “Globalisation,” 971.
72 Patman, “Globalisation,” 971.
73 Patman, “Globalisation,” 971.
74 Patman, “Globalisation,” 971.
would be of the utmost importance for Clinton’s successor to increase military spending.\textsuperscript{75} PNAC was notably explicit about their desire for the US to have a strong military presence all around the globe. In their September 2000 report “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century,” they write that “The presence of American forces in critical regions around the world is the visible expression of the extent of America’s status as a superpower and as the guarantor of liberty, peace and stability.”\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, they suggest that underestimating and/or overlooking the US defense needs will result in both “a lessened capacity for American global leadership” and perhaps even more importantly in their eyes, “the loss of a global security order that is uniquely friendly to American principles and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{77} The blatant adherence to the American exceptionalist notion that the US is somehow uniquely qualified to spread and maintain peace and freedom is particularly striking in these aforementioned lines.

\textit{Colonialism, International Law & The “Relegitimation” of War}

Strikingly, the post-Cold War political moment involved a kind of “relegitimation” of war, or a shift towards framing war as having the potential to be a moral good. Helen Dexter (2008) notes the combining of military force with purported humanitarian aims, writing “War, it seems, is no longer the prerogative of international criminals, but the first resort of the righteous.”\textsuperscript{78} This kind of rhetoric and ideology very clearly paves the way for neoconservatism, with its simultaneous insistence that the US must protect its interests at all costs, and that protecting US interests is inherently beneficial for all of humanity.

\textsuperscript{76} PNAC, \textit{Rebuilding America’s Defenses}, 14.
\textsuperscript{77} PNAC, \textit{Rebuilding America’s Defenses}, v.
\textsuperscript{78} Dexter, “The ‘New War’ on Terror,” 58.
Relatedly, the idea of “humanitarian intervention” also gained major traction following the end of the Cold War. Dexter highlights a normative shift that occurred during this period, in which the idea that “any use of force should be for the good of humanity” rapidly achieved widespread acceptance.\textsuperscript{79} Intervention, particularly humanitarian intervention, is often justified by Western countries by indirectly invoking the civilization vs. barbarism dichotomy. Essentially, the Western country presents itself as the “civilized,” and thus as the only one capable of saving the “oppressed” from their “barbaric” captors. This sort of rhetoric has plainly visible roots in colonialist ideology, and in some respects, very much mirrors past explanations/justifications for various colonial enterprises.

Tellingly, in the Global South, the notion of humanitarian intervention has largely been rejected as yet another iteration of imperialism, in 2000, at the South Summit of the G-77 held in Havana, Cuba, “a declaration was issued rejecting ‘the so-called 'right' of humanitarian intervention,’ along with ‘other forms of coercion that the Summit also sees as traditional imperialism in a new guise.’”\textsuperscript{80}

Calls for humanitarian intervention, unsurprisingly, frequently invoke concerns about human rights. In the post-Cold War era, it has become increasingly common for human rights violations committed by foreign governments to serve as a sort of automatic justification for exercising military force, or even for engaging in full-blown war.\textsuperscript{81} As Denike explains, the potentially disastrous outcomes of militaristic engagement, as well as the degree to which said engagement is in accordance with international law, suddenly become irrelevant.\textsuperscript{82} It becomes

\textsuperscript{79} Dexter, “The ‘New War’ on Terror,” 58.
\textsuperscript{81} Denike, “The Human Rights of Others,” 96.
\textsuperscript{82} Denike, “The Human Rights of Others,” 96.
rather easy, then, for war to be presented as both “legitimate,” and “just,” regardless of the long-term consequences.

It is important to acknowledge that colonialism has heavily influenced international law, with some scholars alleging that colonialism is in fact “the disavowed basis of modern international law.”

The influence of colonialism on international law is seen most explicitly in international law’ justification of humanitarian intervention. Margaret Denike (2008) writes that “The stories that are told that justify intervention… are part and parcel of the creation of international political order that, through these stories, utilizes longstanding colonial distinctions between "humanity" and its "others”… This distinction between a civilized us and a barbaric enemy other…reenacts and reinforces racist colonial stereotypes through its pretense of benevolent protectionism.” She contends that “There is a strong cultural tradition of the colonial West that longs to define…the savage other,” extending back to Christopher Coloumbus. She describes Columbus’ characterization of Indigenous Caribbeans as “dog-headed cannibals,” writing that “The cannibalistic savage that was literally and figuratively constructed… as the antithesis of human civilization, provided a moral justification for their extermination.”

This narrative of “us” in opposition to the “the Other” compels a kind of “implicit ‘hierarchization’ of humanity,” thus justifying war waged by the superior, civilized “us” on behalf of the inferior, barbaric “Other.” This dynamic will be seen very clearly in the following chapter.

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This will be explored in greater detail in a later chapter on the state of exception, but in particular, many foreign policy tenets that are often seen as unique to the Bush administration’s foreign policy and/or unique to neoconservatism, most notably the idea of preemptive war and the creation of a new legal category of unlawful enemy combatants, are blatant reproductions of early Western strategies to justify a multiplicity of colonialist endeavors.  

I believe that neoconservatives primarily adopt the language of humanitarian intervention as a way of obscuring their true intentions, and as a way of avoiding and/or countering criticisms that their aspirations for US hegemony are imperialist. This is rather ironic, however, as humanitarian intervention, as discussed above, is largely a Western concept and practice, and is, at least in part, built off of colonialist ideas about what defines one’s humanity and colonialist dichotomies of civilization vs. barbarism.

The End of History vs. The Clash of Civilizations & Neoconservative Foreign Policy

Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) and Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) are two prominent political texts that are commonly understood to be in direct opposition to each other. I believe, however, that it is more appropriate to see them as having worked together/in conjunction to generate support for invading Iraq, as well as for the broader mission of the War on Terror. In *The End of History*, Fukuyama argued that the end of the Cold War signified the “end of history” because the Soviet Union had fallen, and as such, there no longer existed an alternative model to liberal capitalism. Essentially, the US political, social, and economic model had won, triggering the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution.” Huntington, on the other hand, argued that a new conflict would emerge in the post-Cold War era, a battle between Western civilization and Islamic civilization. Many people

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89 Tanguay, “Hijacking History,” 15.
came to view the events of 9/11 as proving Huntington’s thesis to be true. Jelly-Schapiro asserts that the “Clash of Civilizations” narrative was “recited with new volume at the onset of the War on Terror,” and that this narrative revitalizes colonialist ideas of humanity; he writes that Huntington “condemns the other to eternal confinement in a space outside of history.”\textsuperscript{90} And we do indeed see the Bush administration and much of mainstream mass media confirming to the general public that Huntington had been correct. However, we also see both Bush and the media arguing that invading Iraq (and the War on Terror as a whole) are necessary because Fukuyama’s world does not exist yet. The War on Terror is thus presented as having the unique capacity to bring Fukuyama’s world to fruition. Essentially, the arguments used to make the case for invading Iraq simultaneously invoke ideas fundamental to both Huntington’s and Fukuyama’s arguments.

Relatedly, neoconservative foreign policy, especially as practiced by the Bush administration, merged liberalism with realism. It did so by adding a moral dimension to the US’s quest for global dominance, such that its core strategy could be described as comprising “Fukuyama plus force.”\textsuperscript{91} This is quite evident in the 2002 National Security Strategy which is the document where the Bush Doctrine is most clearly formulated and articulated. According to The Strategy, the US should be seeking to “create a balance of power that favors human freedom.”\textsuperscript{92}

Two defining features of The Strategy are its proposed adoption of increased unilateralism in US foreign policy and its assertion that the US has a right to preemptive military

\textsuperscript{90}Jelly-Schapiro, \textit{Security and Terror}, 3.
\textsuperscript{91}Rojek, “Rhetorical Alchemy,” 72.
action. In particular, The Strategy calls for “a distinctly American internationalism.” This “American internationalism” naturally includes the right to act preemptively, and given that preemptive military action is largely disparaged by most states, “American internationalism” becomes an inherently unilateral endeavor. The Strategy clearly confirms this: “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone…to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.” Interestingly, Rojecki argues that Bush’s foreign policy, and neoconservatism more broadly, essentially “extended the Monroe Doctrine to the remainder of the globe.”

A turn towards unilateralism in US foreign policy was evident prior to both 9/11 and the 2002 National Security Strategy as well. Patman provides several examples of the the Bush administration clearly repudiating multilateralism and international law: they “renounced the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, unsigned the Rome treaty creating an International Criminal Court, withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and rejected the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.” Several other neoconservative values were present in Bush’s ideology prior to 9/11 as well. In late 1999, for example, during a campaign speech at the Reagan library, Bush identified American interests as being unequivocally linked to American values; essentially, there is never a time when one may be compelled to choose between the two (meaning American values and American interests) because “America, by decision and destiny,

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93 Rojecki, “Rhetorical Alchemy,” 72.
96 Rojecki, “Rhetorical Alchemy,” 82.
promotes political freedom.\textsuperscript{98} The use of both “decision” and “destiny” here is striking, given that, in this respect, they are virtual opposites.

\textit{The Globalization of Security: From Clinton to Bush}

In addition to the development of neoconservative ideology and an increased focus on the potential humanitarian aims of wars, there were a number of other significant shifts that took place in the realm of foreign policy in the 1990s. Many of these changes relate to a kind of broader pattern of globalization, specifically a globalization of security. David Chandler (2009) identifies a “shift from a policy discourse of national defence to one of global security.”\textsuperscript{99} Importantly, this globalization of security entailed not only increasingly global threats to nation-state security, but also a globalization of what security itself should mean, and by extension, a globalization of war; in other words, globalization of security intrinsically involves an increasingly global understanding of what needs to be secured. Chandler characterizes global war as “the desire to control and regulate at the global level” and as “the struggle for securing the reproduction of power, written on a global scale, rather than that of the nation-state.”\textsuperscript{100}

This shift was quite evident in the foreign policy of the Clinton administration. The February 1995 National Security Strategy, for example, promoted “engagement and enlargement,” arguing that the US should be a leader on the global stage, especially by “protecting, consolidating and enlarging the community of free market democracies.”\textsuperscript{101} In fact, creating and preserving global conditions preferable for free trade can be seen as a cornerstone of Clinton’s foreign policy. Grandin writes that Clinton “expanded the concept of defense to include

\textsuperscript{98} McCrisken, “George W. Bush,” 183.


\textsuperscript{100} Chandler, “War without End(s),” 244.

both the maintenance of a free-trade global economy and the policing of global crises—even when those crises were not directly connected to threats to the United States.”\footnote{Grandin, \textit{Empire’s Workshop}, 223.} In other words, Clinton’s foreign policy was, like many of his predecessors’, principally concerned with making the world safe for capitalism.

Grandin points to several core tenets of neoconservatism, particularly those central to the Bush Doctrine, as having already been in practice during Clinton’s presidency, most notably “the promotion of free-trade capitalism as the only acceptable road to development, the tendency to view America’s interests as the world’s interests, and a willingness among Washington’s political classes to use military force to advance those interests.”\footnote{Grandin, \textit{Empire’s Workshop}, 224.} Clinton’s eagerness to use military force was evident in several different conflicts/engagements during his presidency, but most relevant for this paper, in the relentless bombing of Iraq towards the end of his presidency; Wolfowitz, in fact, expressed his approval of Clinton’s policy towards Iraq, particularly pleased that Iraq was being bombed “without a whimper of opposition in the Congress and barely a mention in the press.”\footnote{Grandin, \textit{Empire’s Workshop}, 224.}

Many of the differences between Clinton’s and Bush’s foreign policy do not necessarily stem from ideological differences, but rather from different political conditions, both domestically and internationally. In this regard, there are clear continuities between the foreign policy of Clinton and Bush (II). Put differently, it would be overly simplistic and inaccurate to view Bush’s foreign policy as a complete deviation from standard American foreign policy, or as solely influenced by neoconservative doctrine; broader political shifts influenced by the US’s newfound position in the international order post-Cold War must be taken into account. Neta Crawford (2004) describes US foreign policy as tending to fluctuate between three primary
ideologies, namely unilateral minimalism, unilateral imperialism, and responsible multilateralism, arguing that in the decade leading up to 9/11, US foreign policy had already been “moving toward a global and imperial strategy.” Grandin characterizes Clinton’s foreign policy as “a bridge between Reagan’s resurgent nationalism and George W. Bush’s revolutionary imperialism.” Additionally, there are major convergences between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, especially in the realm of foreign policy; these convergences will not be discussed in depth in this paper, however.

It is important to acknowledge that there is not really scholarly consensus on the degree to which PNAC and small, elite groups of neoconservative intellectuals influenced post-9/11 foreign policy, especially pertains to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Some scholars like Grandin, as I have touched on, reject the notion that neoconservative ideology was something new in the early 21st century, as well as the belief that neoconservatism was primarily supported by a small group of republican ideologues. Rather, Grandin contends that neoconservative doctrine has long been influencing US foreign policy, especially policy towards Latin America, and that years before 9/11, neoconservative principles had received bipartisan embrace and had thus been integrated into mainstream US foreign policy.

I agree with Grandin here, but I do make some distinction between the implementation of neoconservative ideology in US foreign policy pre-9/11 and the implementation of the same post-9/11. In particular, I identify a major difference in the role of the general public. Much of the US’s involvement in Latin America during the 20th century, especially in the second half of the 20th century, was highly covert, with many operations entirely concealed from the public.

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106 Grandin, Empire’s Workshop, 223.
107 Grandin, Empire’s Workshop, 15.
and thus did not require the same degree of mass support from the American public that the War on Terror did. A bipartisan embrace of neoconservative foreign policy in the US government and among select elite intellectual circles does not necessarily translate into an embrace of neoconservative foreign policy among the general public, hence the need to foment a moral panic.

**Moral Panic**

*Introduction*

In this section of my paper I will provide evidence that supports one of my central claims, namely that the Bush administration, with support from mainstream mass media, used rhetoric rooted in American exceptionalism to foment a moral panic, with the ultimate goal of generating support for invading Iraq. To reiterate, I am drawing from Scott Bonn’s definition of an elite-engineered moral panic, and as such, I am defining a moral panic as the result of a successful attempt by those who wield political power to define something or someone as a threat to broader society. Bonn identifies stage one of a moral panic as occurring when the threat is first clearly defined; in the case of the leadup to the the invasion of Iraq, this stage was initiated when Bush “provided a formal definition of ‘threatened US values’” and when the media began parroting the Bush administration’s rhetoric, enhanced by the usage of “powerful images.”

Bonn outlines four distinct types of rhetoric that were employed by the Bush administration in the period between 9/11 and the start of the US invasion of Iraq in order to prove the necessity of going to war with Iraq. These types are reactive, rehabilitative, punitive,

and communitarian. The examples Bonn provides for each type of rhetoric are as follows: “the Iraqi people need our help” (reactive), “the Iraqis embrace freedom” (rehabilitative), “Iraq is part of an axis of evil” (punitive), and “Iraq threatens every American” (communitarian).

According to Bonn, both the Bush administration and mainstream media primarily favored punitive and communitarian modes of rhetoric, but in the last few months before the invasion, they increasingly employed rehabilitative rhetoric in conjunction with reactive rhetoric, most likely to appeal to Americans who had been unconvinced by and/or had rejected the more punitive and communitarian rhetoric that had previously been the primary strategy for gaining support for war with Iraq. Interestingly, under the previous Bush administration during the leadup to the Gulf War, both public opinion polls and focus groups showed that the American public was more influenced and convinced by rhetoric that focused on the evil nature of Saddam Hussein, rather than rhetoric that highlighted economic motivations (jobs and oil).

Bonn performed a content analysis of articles published in The New York Times between March 1st, 2000 and March 18th, 2003; he found that upwards of five thousand articles about Iraq and/or Saddam Hussein were published in said period. In the six months leading up to the start of the invasion, The New York Times published an average of 105 articles per month about Iraq that included direct quotes from the Bush administration; this represented a “350% increase from the thirty-six-month average.”

Us vs. Them & Bush’s “Axis of Evil”

109 Bonn, Mass Deception, 63.
110 Bonn, Mass Deception, 63.
111 Bonn, Mass Deception, 63.
113 Bonn, Mass Deception, 82.
114 Bonn, Mass Deception, 82.
One of the primary strategies utilized by the Bush administration to generate moral panic was to present the perpetrators of 9/11 as just one small part of a uniquely dangerous global terrorist threat. Bush informed the American public soon after 9/11 that “Our war begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”115 In the same speech, he famously declared that “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make: Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” clearly initiating a battle between an “us” and a “them.”116 Four months later, in his State of the Union address on January 29th, 2002, Bush warned of the existence of an “axis of evil” consisting of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea; despite the fact that these are three disparate nations, Bush justified grouping together by claiming that the governments of all three countries were actively seeking weapons of mass destruction, and thus “pose a grave and growing danger.”117 He further linked the “axis of evil” to the threat of terrorism, asserting that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea “could provide…arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.”118 Iraq specifically was labeled by Bush as “a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.”119 This is when the campaign for invading Iraq first got underway. Notably, at the time of the State of the Union address, however, “most Americans were not convinced that Iraq represented a clear and imminent danger to the United States.”120

To refer back to Bonn and moral panic theory, Bush’s “axis of evil” can be understood as a sort of folk devil, i.e., a group that is “socially defined to be responsible for creating a threat to

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115 Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
society.” Folk devils are generally defined as such via persistent and consistent labeling by powerful political actors and their powerful counterparts in mass media. Bonn argues that the classification of “folk devil” often “becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as public fear and media coverage both prompt and justify punitive actions by legal authorities towards the folk devils.”

Interestingly, Bush did not only group Iran, Iraq, and North Korea together because they all (purportedly) were seeking weapons of mass destruction and were potentially harboring terrorists, but also because they all “preach a gospel of hate.” Bush frequently described Saddam Hussein as “evil.” At a news conference just one month after 9/11, Bush included in his response to a question about whether or not he would be extending the War on Terror beyond Afghanistan, “There’s no question the leader of Iraq is an evil man.”

Bush’s use of the word “evil,” however, extended beyond men like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden to become part of a grander us vs. them narrative, a narrative which has clear colonialist origins, as explained in the previous chapter. In his commencement address at West Point in June, 2002, Bush announced “We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name.” Natsu Taylor Saito (2010) describes this statement by Bush as indirectly “invoking” Reagan’s characterization of the Soviet Union as the “evil empire,” once again exemplifying that both American exceptionalist rhetoric and colonialist rhetoric are recurrent themes in presidential addresses to the American public.

Bush’s us vs. them narrative often included fairly overt invocations of the traditional colonialist dichotomy of civilized vs. uncivilized. For example, Bush proclaimed “Everyone

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125 “Bush, “The President’s News Conference.”
127 Ibid.
must choose; you’re either with the civilized world, or you’re with the terrorists. All in the Middle East also must choose and must move decisively in word and deed against terrorist attacks.” Saito explains, “rationality is viewed in Western philosophy as the defining characteristic of civilized human beings, and therefore the characterization of the enemy as ‘uncivilized’ justifies a preemptive attack because of the nature, rather than specific acts, of the enemy.”

Essentially, if one is uncivilized, then one is also irrational, and thus one’s actions can be neither predicted nor explained. If this is the case, it is then permissible or justifiable to respond to the uncivilized preemptively, i.e., before they commit an act of aggression. Prominent newspapers like *The New York Times* played an active role in perpetuating this us vs. them narrative, including via the dissemination of Islamophobic propaganda; Esch points out that in the months after 9/11, articles in *The New York Times* featured the following headlines: “Yes, this is about Islam,” “This is a religious war,” Diffusing the holy bomb,” and “Barbarians at the gate.” Similarly to Esch, Denike draws attention to the ways in which Muslim women in particular have been “alibied” for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; we are told that it is not only just, but that it is our moral obligation to invade and occupy these countries in order to liberate/rescue Muslim women from the “barbaric” and “uncivilized” Muslim men who control them. It should not be difficult to see the colonialist logic that is operating here.

### The Terrorist Threat

The Bush administration frequently conflated diverse terrorist groups with one another and/or encouraged others to not make any distinction between different terrorist groups. National

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130 Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 381.
Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice cautioned, “You cannot condemn al-Qaida and hug Hamas,” reiterating that the Bush administration’s message is “never legitimate.”

Rice continued by characterizing terrorism as intrinsically evil and asserting that, “Terrorists are not for anything. Terrorists are against peace, against freedom; they are against life itself.” Rice’s statements are notable here not only because al-Qaeda and Hamas are distinct organizations, with distinct ideologies, motivations, and methods, but also because her description of terrorists contradicts the widespread understanding of, and consensus that, terrorists have political aims, and thus are “for” something.

However, neither said terrorist threat nor terrorism more broadly were ever clearly and precisely defined to the public. Rather, the Bush administration thrived on the idea of a vaguely-defined enemy. The strategy of lumping together a wide range of actors (state and non-state alike) with differing means and motivations as one threatening network of evil had several benefits. For one thing, it gave the US license, or perhaps more accurately, a certain degree of legitimacy, to initiate military operations against anyone deemed an enemy of the US, regardless of their actual involvement in the 9/11 attacks. There was never any remotely credible evidence linking Iraq or Saddam Hussein to 9/11, yet 9/11 was nonetheless presented as offering some sort of justification for invading Iraq.

Additionally, this strategy was useful in that it compelled the public to avoid any attempts to understand the motives of the 9/11 terrorists nor to reflect on what role the US government may have had in inspiring such hatred. By presenting the public with an enemy who is purportedly solely guided by pure evil and who also purportedly poses a substantial threat to the

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133 Ibid.
US and “civilized” society at large, the Bush administration ensured that the American public would both reject employing any kind of nuance in their assessment of the terrorist threat and would support harsh militarized actions against anyone suspecting of being (or harboring) a terrorist. These harsh militarized actions, and public approval of them, will be discussed in the next chapter. Natsu Taylor Saito (2010) explains the nature of this strategy well via her assertion that Bush “emphasized the imperative of responding rather than analyzing.” She points to a quote from Bush in which he affirmed “We cannot fully understand the designs and power of evil. It is enough to know that evil, like goodness, exists.”

Connections with American Exceptionalism

This strategy is clearly not only rooted in American exceptionalist values, but also seeks to preserve the credibility of American exceptionalism on a national scale. Esch explains this relationship particularly well:

“Rhetoric that folds diverse (and often adversarial) groups into a single enemy draws upon and recreates the myth of American Exceptionalism by downplaying nuances that would undercut the image of America as an indispensable nation fulfilling a divine mission, and by overlooking complex details in favor of dichotomous generalities.”

Nine days after 9/11, in an address to a joint session of the Congress, Bush declared the perpetrators of 9/11 to be “enemies of freedom,” and proclaimed the dawning of a new world, “a world where freedom itself is under attack.” This heavy emphasis on freedom as the central thing that terrorists are in opposition to has several implications. “Freedom” as a concept is inarguably a fundamental part of the American mythos, and I suggest, is viewed by many as inextricable from American identity. Thus, focusing on freedom invokes American exceptionalist

135Saito, Meeting the Enemy, 12.
136Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 375 - 376
137Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
notions that the US is both a beacon of freedom and uniquely qualified to judge what freedom itself truly is. If freedom is so essential to American identity that it can be seen as representing the US itself, then terrorists are in opposition to the US not as a political entity or as a state, but as an idea; it is thus not specific policies, or even the US government more broadly that the terrorists hate, but rather America itself.

Relatedly, Bush very much drew on religious themes of American exceptionalism in his discussions of terrorism and the axis of evil, and in his promotion of a global “War on Terror.” This is very evident, for example, in the 2003 State of the Union address in which Bush declared: “Americans are a free people who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity.”

This quote is notable for its reassertion that Americans have an innate ability to know and understand freedom, but also for the explicitly religious nature of it. In particular, Bush seems to be implying that there is some sort of special and unique connection between the US and God; freedom may be God’s gift and not America’s, but if Americans know freedom so intimately, and in a way that others do not, one can presume that Americans and/or the US have an unusually close relationship with God. Even more explicitly, Bush did proclaim the War on Terror to be “the calling of the USA, the most free nation in the world.” Patman (2006) claims that “It was almost as if Bush was saying that to spread American values in a troubled world was to be on the side of God and to resist them was to oppose God.”

139Patman, “Globalisation,” 973.
140Ibid.
It should be noted that polls from 2002 and 2003 reveal that at this time, somewhere between 57% and 65% of Americans considered religion to be “very important” in their lives, with only 12% to 18% of Americans viewing religion as “not very important.” Additionally, in November 2001, 78% of Americans expressed a belief that “religion’s influence in American life was increasing;” six months before 9/11, less than half had said the same. It is thus reasonable to conclude that 9/11 induced a sort of resurgence in religious belief, and that, as such, language with religious undertones would have held substantial appeal for many Americans at this, and as such, would have been highly effective at both facilitating a moral panic and at generating support for invading Iraq.

9/11 and The War on Terror

It is important to remember that moral panic was fomented not simply to generate support for invading Iraq, but also to generate support for engaging in a new sort of war that could have the potential to last indefinitely—a war that would be fought not against one group, but rather against a wide-ranging network of groups (not necessarily united by ideology). Bush and members of his administration constantly reiterated that the US was not just in a war with al-Qaeda, but in a war with every possible manifestation of terrorism. In an interview with Al Jazeera in October, 2001, Condoleeza Rice said “The President has made very clear that the war on terrorism is a broad war on terrorism. You can’t be for terrorism in one part of the world and against it in another part of the world.”

141 Patman, “Globalisation,” 977.
In order to fully understand how and why the post-9/11 moral panic was generated, it is necessary to first recognize and understand that the meaning attached to the events of 9/11 is not inherent to themselves, but it instead constructed societally. In the words of Esch, “it was not the terrorist acts themselves that changed the global landscape, it was the United States’ response” and said response was “made possible through a shared, mythologized understanding of the significance of 9/11.” Essentially, the attacks of 9/11 themselves would not automatically have led to a moral panic; it is elite manipulation (made possible by pre-existing belief in American exceptionalism) resulting in mass consensus about what the attacks meant that facilitated the conditions for moral panic to thrive.

*American Victimhood*

Interestingly, while American exceptionalist ideology very much conceptualizes the US as having, or as deserving to have, great power, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is a flip-side to this in which the US is understood to perpetually exist in a state of victimhood, regardless of any evidence pointing to the opposite. This sense of victimhood very much came to the fore in the days, weeks, and months after 9/11.

The persistent and relentless reinforcing of the understanding of the US as a perpetual victim post-9/11 by political and media elites had substantial political utility, particularly as relates to justifying things like the invasion and occupation of Iraq, as well as all forms of militarized/violent actions that directly harm civilian populations. Esch contends that this mass perception of the US as an inherently innocent victim “makes it possible for military actions that are prima facie offensive…to be understood as retaliatory,” as victims can intrinsically only be engaged in acts of defense or retribution, not in acts of aggression. By extension, this framing

144 Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,” 365
145 Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,” 373
of the US acts to “shift the moral responsibility for the suffering and civilian deaths resulting from American military action onto the original attacker.”

The victim narrative was regularly furthered and reinforced via the oft-posed question “why do they hate us?” This question was raised and answered both by Bush and others in his administration, as well as in many prominent newspapers (and other forms of media). Norman Podhoretz, a prominent neoconservative intellectual, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that a “barbaric culture had declared war not because of our policies but for what we stood for—democracy and freedom.” Similarly, nine days after 9/11, in an address to a joint session of Congress, Bush declared:

“We are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this Chamber, a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

Essentially, it is the very idea of freedom that the terrorists hate, and thus they hate the essence of America itself; if this is indeed true, then there is no reason to seek to understand the motivations/psychology behind acts of terrorism, nor is there any reason to reflect on the ramifications of one’s own policies.

At other times, Bush responded to the question “Why do they hate us?” with a stunning degree of incredulity. During a news conference one month after 9/11, he said the following: “I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about, that people would hate us … like most Americans, I just can't believe it, because I know how good we are.” Bush, however, followed this up with an acknowledgement that “we've got to do a better job of making

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146 Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 373
147 Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 381
148 Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
our case” in an attempt to appeal to Muslims and/or Middle Easterners and reassure them of the true and just nature of the War on Terror.\textsuperscript{150} Bush specified “We've got to do a better job of explaining to the people in the Middle East, for example, that we don't fight a war against Islam or Muslims. We don't hold any religion accountable. We're fighting evil.”\textsuperscript{151} Of course, “evil” though is an abstract concept and not a concrete thing one can wage a war against, and thus one is left to wonder what it actually means to be “fighting evil.”

\textit{WMDs and Imminent Catastrophe: Building Support for the War}

Bush often invoked World War II, particularly the defeat of fascism and Nazism, when discussing the War on Terror. For example, he described the terrorists as “heirs to fascism” with “the same disdain for the individual, the same mad global ambitions.”\textsuperscript{152} In other words, “by sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism and nazism and totalitarianism.”\textsuperscript{153} By extension then, if terrorists are simply the newest iteration of fascists, there is no hope for negotiating with them or appeasing them; rather, they must be destroyed. Esch explains that this rhetoric is meant to convince the American public that “anything short of a full-scale ‘War on Terror’ would amount to appeasement of the latest ‘murderous ideology.’”\textsuperscript{154} This is very effective rhetoric, in large part because, as discussed in earlier chapters, World War II occupies a unique position in American collective memory as a uniquely good and just war. As such, if the US’ new enemies are comparable to the US’ enemies during World War II, then these new enemies must be fought in a similar fashion, i.e., in a large war fought on the global scale; if one accepts this argument to be true, the “War on Terror” is then “just.”

\textsuperscript{150}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152}Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 378.
\textsuperscript{153}Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
\textsuperscript{154}Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror,’” 379.
There are countless instances where Bush employed catastrophic language in a way clearly designed to provoke extreme fear among the general populace. The 2002 State of the Union is a prime example of this: Bush warned “Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking timebombs, set to go off without warning.” What could be scarier than the prospect of highly-trained mass murderers ready to kill at any moment stationed all across the globe?

As is now widely known, there was a concerted effort by the Bush administration to manipulate the American public into believing that Saddam Hussein was in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and thus posed an imminent danger to the United States, and to the world at large. The Bush administration founded a new branch in the Pentagon, titled nebulously and forebodingly the Office of Special Plans. The Office of Special Plans was led by Douglas Feith, who served as the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Bush administration; the office primarily relied on raw intelligence in order to “establish Iraq’s nuclear threat and ties with al Qaeda as ‘mature and symbiotic.’” These claims were declared to be “not supported by the available intelligence” in an investigation performed by the Inspector General of the Department of Defense.

The Bush administration also established the White House Iraq Group (WHIG); primarily run by Karl Rove, WHIG was created in August 2002 to formulate an effective media campaign for linking Iraq to WMDs. It should be noted, however, that planning for the Iraq War began long before the Bush Administration’s campaign to generate public support for it. Only two months after 9/11, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed then-CENTCOM commander

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155 Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
156 Shafir and Schairer, “The War on Terror,” 27.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
Tommy Franks to “initiate planning for the ‘decapitation’ of the Iraqi government and the empowerment of a ‘Provisional Government’ to take its place.”

The US government had first been informed that the Iraqi government had expressed interest in buying aluminum tubes a few months prior to 9/11. One CIA analyst, who was not a nuclear weapons expert, reached the conclusion that the type of aluminum tubes Iraq was looking to purchase were meant for “uranium enrichment centrifuges to manufacture nuclear weapons.” The CIA then proceeded to alert Bush of the analyst’s opinion via a President’s Daily Brief. However, many nuclear weapons experts quickly began to challenge the CIA’s claims, and on April 11, 2001, scientists from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory announced that “the diameter of the tubes was off by 50 percent (compared to a centrifuge that Iraq tested in 1990),” and due to “other discrepancies” as well, “concluded the tubes were probably not intended for centrifuges.”

The Role of the Media

The Bush administration's claims regarding Saddam Hussein and WMDs were given significant attention by mass media, and were repeatedly presented as fact, regardless of any evidence indicating otherwise. For example, in September, 2002, The New York Times ran an article on their front page entitled “U.S. Says Hussein Intensified Quest for A-Bomb Parts.” This article was largely based on documents that had been intentionally leaked by the Bush administration, and following its publication, a number of high-ranking officials from the administration, namely Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleeza

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160 Battle, “The Iraq War - Part I.”
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
Rice, and Secretary of State Colin Powell, appeared on prominent talk shows to further bring attention to the article’s claims. Less than a week later, when *The New York Times* learned that multiple intelligence agencies had not verified these claims about Hussein, the article was simply moved to the inside pages of the newspaper.

Anthony R. DiMaggio (2015) provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which mainstream mass media interacted with the Bush administration post-9/11. He notes that *The Washington Post* frequently published editorials regurgitating the Bush administration's claims about WMDs and calling for war with Iraq, arguing that Saddam Hussein “shelters terrorists who have killed Americans and would like to kill more” and has manipulated UN weapons inspectors such that “it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses WMDs.” Between August 2002 and March 2003, *The Washington Post* published upwards of 140 front-page stories that “heavily emphasized administration rhetoric.” DiMaggio finds that *The New York Times* tended to be somewhat more critical of the Bush administration, in comparison to *The Washington Post*, but that the difference between editorials published in the two papers was “one of procedure over substance.” He explains:

> “Whereas the Post gave unqualified support to Bush, the Times posed strategic questions about the timing of an invasion, the need to allow U.N. weapons inspectors more time, drawbacks of failing to gain allied support, and the need to garner support from the United Nations and exhaust diplomatic options, as well as concerns about the cost of an occupation and potential American lives lost.”

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166 Battle, “The Iraq War - Part I.”
167 Tarrow, “War, States, and Contention,” 158.
169 DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, 75.
170 DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, 76-77.
171 Ibid.
Many of the questions posed by *The New York Times* were similar to concerns that had been raised by Congressional Democrats; once more Democratic politicians began to express support for the war, and especially once the invasion actually began, *The New York Times* changed their tune, fully throwing their weight behind the war.\textsuperscript{172}

At a certain point, the Bush administration began to very clearly single out Iraq as posing a uniquely terrifying threat to the US. Wojtek Mackiewicz Wolfe (2008) claims that Bush’s “marketing campaign” peaked in October, 2002, about six months before the invasion of Iraq began; he writes that, “the major thematic frames, terror, WMDs, threat, war…converged to clearly define Iraq as a threat to U.S. security.”\textsuperscript{173} In October 2002, at a speech in Cincinnati, Ohio, Bush told the audience:

“Some ask why Iraq is different from other countries or regimes that also have terrible weapons. While there are many dangers in the world, the threat from Iraq stands alone because it gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place. Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant who has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people. This same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East, has invaded and brutally occupied a small neighbor, has struck other nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States.”\textsuperscript{174}

The Bush administration often deflected questions raised as to whether or not there was definitive proof that Saddam Hussein had successfully built and/or acquired WMDs by highlighting the possibility of imminent catastrophe. Condoleeza Rice, Bush’s National Security Advisor, infamously declared, “there will always be some uncertainty… but we don’t want the smoking gun to become a mushroom cloud.”\textsuperscript{175}

On the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, Bush made a final attempt to clearly couch the impending invasion in American exceptionalist language that positions the US as being eternally

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Mackiewicz Wolfe, *Winning the War of Words*, 65.
\textsuperscript{174} George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on Iraq From Cincinnati, Ohio” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/215740
\textsuperscript{175} Shafir and Schairer, “The War on Terror,” 28.
good-hearted and as having the unparalleled ability to act as the world’s savior; “To all of the men and women of the United States Armed Forces now in the Middle East,” he said, “the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you.”

In the following chapter, I discuss the many policies implemented in the wake of 9/11 that I believe established (and then cemented) a new state of exception centered around the notion of “homeland security”. While this chapter has primarily focused on the ways in which moral panic contributed to support for the Iraq War, I argue that the moral panic fomented in the days, weeks, and months after 9/11 also paved the way for the institution of policies that violated domestic and/or international law, and violated fundamental civil liberties. These policies, I contend, can be understood as creating a permanent state of exception that continues to exist to this day.

**State of Exception**

*Background*

There has been much scholarly exploration of states of exception as relates to their sanctioning by international law. Claudia Aradau & Rens van Munster (2009) discuss the relationship between exceptionalism and international relations, contending that some sort of state of exception is fundamental to the modern liberal international order. They assert that “Law and social order depend upon a ‘founding crime’ or upon an act of war” and that there exists a “paradox of modern liberal political communities that define themselves as governed by the rule of law: the law needs a ‘founding crime,’ a moment of violence or injustice—the exception—in order to function.” This founding crime or exception then becomes the basis of the colonialist

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177 Aradau & van Munster, “Exceptionalism,” 689.
dichotomy that emerges in which there exists a battle of sorts between “good and evil” and between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized.”

In other words, the creation of this exception “institutionalizes fear of the enemy as the constitutive principle for society.”178 This fear of the enemy establishes a clear boundary or dividing line between friend and enemy, in turn, creating “homogenous identities that need to be defended.”179 The figure of the enemy is relegated to a space of either infrahumanity or inhumanity, such that the enemy’s life is “unworthy.”180 Aradau & van Munster describe both domestic and international law as being “dependent on the ‘ban’ of unworthy life.”181

Jelly-Schapiro elucidates the history of the state of exception, specifically its relationship with political liberalism, in part via a discussion of John Locke’s philosophy. Locke believed that there are certain instances when the legislature is “incapable of acting with the required expediency;” in these situations, it becomes both appropriate and necessary for there to be an increase in executive power.182 Essentially, there are circumstances in which the public welfare, or perhaps more accurately societal security, “demand the exercise of prerogative power.”183 This kind of power, Jelly-Schapiro, contends, is not in reality “exceptional,” but instead is a “basic and permanent feature of the modern liberal state.”184 In other words, somewhat paradoxically, the state of exception is one of the primary legal means of exerting power in liberal states.

As briefly touched on in the first chapter, in many ways, the state of exception as a mode power was borne out of colonialism. Achille Mbembe has labeled the colony as the zone of

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178Aradau & van Munster, “Exceptionalism,” 689.
179Aradau & van Munster, “Exceptionalism,” 690.
181Ibid.
182Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 36.
183Ibid.
184Ibid.
exception “par excellence,” i.e., the place “where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization.’”

States of Exception in US History

There are a variety of situations and/or events that can precipitate the declaration of a state of emergency, including but not limited to war, economic crises, civil strife, and natural disasters. While these are diverse situations, all of them entail some sort of loss of security; they are all situations that seemingly require a restoration of security. This absence of security then “permits the suspension of the law, by the law, in the name of the law.” Jelly-Schapiro contends that security, in fact, is the “keyword of contemporary governance,” and while it is both a “basic human want” and a “normative social good,” it is also “a mode of power.” In this way, we can see clearly that states of exception are almost always instituted in the name of security.

After World War I, for example, Jelly-Schapiro describes emergency executive powers as having been “enacted in the economic realm, as a response not to violent disorder but to capitalist crisis.” Essentially, this highlights that states of exception can be instituted in a number of different circumstances; however, there is almost always some sort of crisis of security that triggers a state of exception.

More relevant for the purposes of this paper is President Harry S. Truman’s declaration of emergency in 1950, following the Chinese invasion of Korea. Jelly-Schapiro describes Truman’s declaration as being hugely impactful for today’s national security state; in many ways, one can understand Truman’s proclamation of a state of emergency as having paved the way for our current indefinite state of exception. He writes that Truman’s declaration “consolidated the

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185 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 37-38.
186 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 4.
187 Ibid.
188 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 4.
189 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 38.
emergent but already hegemonic National Security state— a new political order founded on the
specter of total and permanent war, which blurred the spatial and temporal distinctions between
war and peace and incorporated all of society into the military sphere.”

Truman’s declaration

was principally concerned with the threat of “communist imperialism” posed by China, a threat
that was said to have the potential to destroy the US’s cherished capitalist freedom, and was thus
“existential” in nature. Just a few days before, Truman’s National Security Council had
presented Truman with a highly influential document known as NSC-68, which essentially
outlined the need for military expansion and a shifting national security policy in order to
address the new threats posed by communism and the Cold War.

   Jelly-Schapiro designates NSC-68 as the “intellectual and spiritual antecedent of the
Bush Doctrine,” in particular highlighting the catastrophic language employed in the document
that warned of “the ever-present possibility of annihilation,” as well as the document’s insistence
that increased “military and security mobilization” is necessary for the preservation of
civilization itself. Notably, Jelly-Schapiro also points out the ways in which Truman’s national
security policy functioned to shift both the foreign and the domestic political spheres,
particularly as relates to policing and/or securitizing. Essentially, he draws a comparison between
the Cold War state of exception and the post-9/11 state of exception: “In the Cold War
emergency order, military buildup and and McCarthyite repression went hand in hand, just as the
War on Terror and Patriot Act exist in tandem today.”

Evidence of Post-9/11 State of Exception: Authorization for Use of Military Force

190 Jelly-Schapiro, Security and Terror, 39.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
There are a litany of ways in which the state of exception can be seen as operating in the post-9/11 moment. Shortly after 9/11, Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force of 2001 (AUMF) resolution which gave Bush the power to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States.”¹⁹⁵ Notably, the AUMF has been invoked by all three presidents who have succeeded Bush (Obama, Trump, and Biden), and has often enabled them to be vague and/or secretive about the counterterrorism operations the US is engaging in.¹⁹⁶ The AUMF also empowered the Bush administration to detain anyone they suspected of terrorism. Saito (2021) writes that, in the months after 9/11, “the Department of Justice detained several thousand Muslim or Arab immigrants…holding them indefinitely without charge, refusing to release information about who was being held, and often preventing the detainees from contacting their families, friends, or lawyers.”¹⁹⁷

Moreover, the AUMF paved the way for the development of the CIA’s Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation program (RDI); under RDI, the CIA covertly captured and detained 119 different foreign Muslims whom they suspected to be terrorists, holding them at “black sites.”¹⁹⁸ The CIA ran black sites all across the globe, including in Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Thailand, and Afghanistan; locations were selected based on their utility for shielding the CIA

¹⁹⁶Ibid.
from domestic and international law.  

Those detained at the CIA’s “black sites” were “held incommunicado in cruel, inhuman, or deeply degrading conditions for months or years.” At least 39 of the 119 people detained at the “black sites” were tortured as well.  

Evidence of Post-9/11 State of Exception: Unlawful Enemy Combatants  

The creation of a new legal category of “unlawful enemy combatant” is another particularly glaring example of the establishment of a post-9/11 state of exception; those suspected of being engaged in terrorism were redefined and reclassified in such a way that they could not be viewed as criminals nor as prisoners of war. As a result, suspected terrorists were robbed of virtually any legal protection, with both domestic law and international law deemed as not being applicable to them. Perhaps most notably, it was asserted by the Bush administration that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to anyone deemed to be an unlawful enemy combatant.  

Gerson & Shafir describe the designation of “unlawful enemy combatant” as “perhaps the most dramatic example of how the Bush-Cheney Administration created a grey zone to rationalize an invasion of the judicial branches and fortify the executive against checks and balances.” Unlawful enemy combatants were understood to be outside of the purview of the U.S. judicial system, both geographically and otherwise, and as such, the Bush administration was able to establish “a system of detention and trial wholly under executive control.”  

Interestingly, Gershon & Shafir characterize the Bush administration’s quest for unlimited and unlimited and

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199 Ibid.  
200 Ibid.  
203 Ibid.  
204 Tarrow, “War, States, and Contention,” 153.  
unchecked executive power as “the most far-reaching” of the “counterrevolutionary agendas” that were integrated into the mission of the global War on Terror.\textsuperscript{207}

The establishment of a detention center for suspected terrorists at the US’s Guantanamo Bay military base is one of the more infamous manifestations of the post-9/11 state of exception. Sidney Tarrow (2015) elucidates that while the creation of Guantanamo Bay was “justified as a technical and logistical move,” in actuality, the intention was to “place suspects in the power of the government but theoretically outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. courts.”\textsuperscript{208} This intention is made especially evident in a number memos from Bush’s legal team. In a December 28, 2001 memorandum, John Yoo and Patrick Philbin, then deputy assistant attorney generals in the Department of Justice’s Office of Legal Counsel, addressed concerns raised by the Department of Defense about the potential for future detainees at Guantanamo Bay to file habeas corpus petitions: “We believe that…federal courts lack jurisdiction over habeas petitions filed by alien detainees held outside the sovereign territory of the United States.”\textsuperscript{209} They repeatedly state that Guantanamo Bay has been explicitly defined as “outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States,” and that it thus differs greatly from “other island bases that are considered territories or possessions of the United States” which are “expressly defined within the jurisdiction of specific district courts, even if they are retained largely for military use.”\textsuperscript{210}

Yoo and Philbin also use this memo to express their belief that, if those detained by the Bush administration as unlawful enemy combatants were able to file habeas corpus petitions, that ability would pose a major threat to the success of Bush’s War on Terror. They write, “A habeas petition would allow a detainee to challenge the legality of his status and treatment under

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{207} Shafir and Schairer, “The War on Terror,” 29.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Tarrow, “War, States, and Contention,”161.
\item \textsuperscript{210}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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international treaties… A petitioner might even be able to question the constitutional authority of the President to use force in Afghanistan and the legality of Congress’s statutory authorization in place of a declaration of a war.”\textsuperscript{211} Essentially, they argue that habeas corpus petitions would pave the way for not only questioning the legality of an individual’s detention, but also for questioning the legality of the War on Terror more broadly speaking.

Yoo, along with Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee, also drafted the now infamous “torture memos,” in which they redefined torture such that something must result in pain “equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death” in order to actually count as torture.\textsuperscript{212}

\textit{Evidence of Post-9/11 State of Exception: Homeland Security}

The creation of the Department of Homeland Security is another prime example of the post-9/11 state of exception. Interestingly, prior to 9/11, the term and/or concept of “homeland” was not particularly popular in the American lexicon. This is primarily due to the nativist connotations of the word which contradict the US’s perception of itself as a “nation of immigrants.”\textsuperscript{213} Donald Rumseld himself in fact acknowledged in a memo, several months prior to 9/11, on February 27th, 2001, that “The word ‘homeland’ is a strange word. ‘Homeland’ Defense sounds more German than American.”\textsuperscript{214} Jelly-Schapiro (2018) describes the usage of the word “homeland” as being fundamental to our current iteration of the security project; he characterizes the term “homeland” as “ideally suited to the security project in its postcolonial yet still manifestly imperialist incarnation,” and contends that homeland “describes the peculiar

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} Tarrow, \textit{War, States, and Contention}, 164.
\textsuperscript{213} Tanguay, \textit{Hijacking History}, 175.
predicament of a fading imperial power reverting to blood-soil nativism as its military marches around the world under the banner of Enlightenment universals.”

Discussion of “homeland security” first began in prominent American foreign policy circles in 1998 when Ashton Carter, John Deutch, and Philip Zelikow published “Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger” in *Foreign Affairs*. In this piece, Carter, Deutch, and Zelikow argued that a major transformation needed to take place in the US’s response to global terrorism, especially given that intelligence (in the US and beyond) had failed to predict both the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. They called for a bridging of the divide between “national security” and “law enforcement,” as well as between domestic terrorism and foreign terrorism. Additionally, the article suggested that properly addressing the threat of terrorism would necessitate “the involvement of the private sector in the government’s intelligence apparatus,” and also the “global expansion of U.S. efforts to seek out the sources and the agents of terrorism.”

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was originally split into four distinct branches, namely Border and Transportation Security, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Science and Technology, and Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection. The DHS relies on a number of different actors, both internal and external to the US government; these actors include state and local governments, private corporations, as well as colleges and universities. Notably, with the creation of the DHS came the dissolution of the Immigration

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218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
and Naturalization Service (INS), and as such, most immigration policy became the domain of the DHS, and thus inherently linked with “counterterrorism” measures.\textsuperscript{222}

Bush tried to build support for the creation of the DHS by highlighting the ways in which focusing heavily on homeland security would have manifold benefits, beyond just protecting Americans from potential future terrorist attacks. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush proclaimed, “Homeland security will make America not only stronger but…better. Knowledge gained from bioterrorism research will improve public health. Stronger police and fire departments will mean safer neighborhoods. Stricter border enforcement will help combat illegal drugs.”\textsuperscript{223} This statement does a good job of highlighting how the War on Terror quickly became about more than fighting terrorism and infiltrated the domestic sphere, cementing a state of exception on several different fronts. Six months after the State of the Union address, in June 2002, 72\% of Americans said they supported the creation of the DHS; interestingly though, only 20\% of Americans claimed that they thought the DHS would be “very effective” at “protecting the U.S. from future acts of terrorism.”\textsuperscript{224}

\textit{Evidence of Post-9/11 State of Exception: Legislation and Executive Orders}

The Patriot Act, also known as the USA PATRIOT Act, is arguably one of the most significant pieces of legislation crafted and passed during the War on Terror. Passed just weeks after 9/11, The Patriot Act expanded the definition of terrorism such that protesters engaging in direct action could be classified as terrorists, allowed for increased wire-tapping, and authorized the arbitrary and indefinite detainment of “foreign nationals on mere suspicion, without any of the legal protections of the US constitution.”\textsuperscript{225} The Act also gave the FBI enhanced access to

\textsuperscript{222} Shafir and Schairer, “The War on Terror,” 30
\textsuperscript{223} Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session.”
\textsuperscript{225} Patman, “Globalisation,” 980.
Americans’ personal information and “encouraged police to classify innocent associates of terrorists as terrorists.”

In February 2004, Gallup found that only a minority of Americans (26%) believed that the Patriot Act “goes too far in restricting people’s liberties in order to fight terrorism.” Additionally, the Pew Research Center found that support for the Patriot Act actually increased from 2004 to 2011. In December 2004, 33% of Americans viewed the Patriot Act as “a necessary tool that helps government find terrorists,” with 39% saying that the Patriot Act “goes too far and poses threat to civil liberties;” in comparison, in February 2011, 42% of Americans held the first view and 34% held the latter.

Two months after 9/11, Bush also issued the Military Order of November 13, 2001 which broadened the powers of the executive branch and authorized indefinite detentions of those deemed “enemy combatants,” or simply anyone the Bush administration had reason to believe “is or was a member of al-Qaeda, or has engaged in, aided or abetted, or conspired to commit, acts of international terrorism, or acts in preparation therefore, or who has knowingly harbored one or more such individuals.” The Order establishes Bush’s belief that “an extraordinary emergency exists for national defense purposes,” and that as such, “it is not practicable to apply in military commissions under this order the principles of law and the rules of evidence generally recognized in the trial of criminal cases in the United States district courts.”

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229 Ibid.
231 Henn, Under the Color of Law, 53.
The Order also gives the Secretary of Defense exclusive control over those detained—control that includes the authority to select a location for the detainee to be held “outside or within the United States.”233 Lastly, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Order made clear that “enemy combatants” would not be tried in US criminal courts, and as such, established that “military tribunals” would have “exclusive jurisdiction with respect to offenses by the individual.”234 Martin Henn (2010) asserts that this order “explicitly and unambiguously sidesteps” both the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments of the US constitution, and that it violates more than twenty provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which had been ratified by the US Senate in 1992.235

Understanding the Implications

One of the most important things to understand about the state of exception, particularly its post-9/11 manifestation, is that it not only creates a circumstance/situation in which the normal rule of law does not apply, it creates an entire class of people whom the normal rule of law does not apply to. Essentially, the state of exception simultaneously is able to exist because of colonialist ideology that articulates a civilized vs. uncivilized dichotomy, and further cements and reinforces said dichotomy through its very existence.

There are several different dimensions to the post-9/11 state of exception. In many respects, the very nature of the War on Terror, in particular its interminability, constitutes a state of exception. And arguably, one of the most influential effects of the War on Terror on US governance and political experience is its establishment of a permanent state of exception. In fact, the War on Terror was expressly designed by its architects to be a “forever war.” This is especially evident in the war’s broad, unachievable mission and its proclaimed civilizational

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233Ibid.
234Ibid.
235Henn, Under the Color of Law, 53.
battle against a vague and nonspecific enemy, further explained in the previous chapter. Jelly-Schapiro notes that “terror” is “not a material entity that can be eradicated, but an animating idea,” and that because of this, “the declaration of a War on Terror…explicitly posits the emergency as permanent.”\textsuperscript{236} In this sense, we can understand the post-9/11 state of exception as having a universal impact.

It should be obvious, however, that the post-9/11 state of exception has disproportionately and violently impacted certain groups of people, namely Muslims, immigrants, and people of color more broadly. It is also important to understand the complicated relationship between the state of exception and the concept of humanitarian intervention, in the context of the War on Terror, a war that, as discussed in great depth in the previous chapter, was vehemently marketed as being for the good of humanity. Of course, in reality, as highlighted throughout this chapter, the War on Terror was characterized by the widespread governmental sanctioning of grotesque human rights violations and the tacit creation of a subhuman class of people. Denike explains that the War on Terror was “leveraged by a fear of the (Muslim, Arab) other and a concern for the rights of ‘humanity,’” and thus “conscripts the language of human rights and ‘humanitarian’ causes to substantiate daily civilian atrocities and ‘exceptional’ measures of racial profiling, security arrest warrants, indefinite detentions, torture, deportation.”\textsuperscript{237} Denike highlights a couple of different important things here, namely that the exploitation of human rights language by the architects of the War on Terror permanently altered human rights discourse, as well as that because states of exception almost always include the labelling of a group of people as “subhuman,” the US government was able to somewhat successfully render even the most

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\item[236] Jelly-Schapiro, \textit{Security and Terror}, 41.
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violent components of the War on Terror as guided by principles of human rights and humanitarian intervention.

*Are States of Exception Really “Exceptional”?*

It is difficult to assess the relationship between the state of exception and US governance, both currently and historically. For one thing, many scholars are hesitant to define the state of exception as actually being “exceptional,” arguing instead that the state of exception has always been a central component of US governance. In other words, some scholars argue that it is in fact ahistorical to conceptualize certain policies enacted in the wake of 9/11 as exceptional or aberrational. Put more simply, there is much debate as to whether or not the state of exception is actually the rule. As I touched on earlier, there is a strong argument to be made (and this is an argument I adhere to) that states of exception and the founding of the modern liberal state are intrinsically and inextricably linked. In particular, linking back to Mbembe, one can understand the employment of a state of exception in the colony as a kind of precursor to, or prerequisite for, the establishment of the modern liberal state. Jelly-Schapiro reminds us, “The emergence of the bourgeois state within Europe was made possible by the exceptional terror of colonial power in the New World… European development of the categories of ‘human’ and ‘citizen’ depended upon the racialized dehumanization… of the colonized.” Because of this history, Jelly-Schapiro is critical of scholars like Judith Butler (and Agamben himself) who he interprets as saying that the post-9/11 state of exception signifies “the return of a premodern form rather than the latest iteration of a governmental technology that is basic to political modernity.”

While Jelly-Schapiro concurs that there is much that is exceptional and extraordinary about the War on Terror, he argues that a question of great significance remains, one that asks

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238 Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 86.
“whether what we have witnessed since 2001… represents the advent of a new state form…or if, rather, contemporary imperial formations simply adapt and accentuate capitalist rationalities that are basic to colonial modernity.”  

In other words, does the War on Terror represent a completely new type of state of exception or just the newest iteration of the same sort of state of exception present since colonial times? Saito also touches on this question, primarily via a discussion of the history of mass detention in the US, particularly as relates to War on Terror detentions in places like Guantamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. She argues, “We cannot identify a point in United States history where ‘the state of exception begins to become the rule;’ it has always been the rule. Mass internments were integral to the establishment of the state and have been consistently utilized to maintain its hegemony, domestically and globally.”  

Saito also points out that, especially during wartime, “The United States’ government has consistently asserted a prerogative to detain persons considered politically subversive, without charge or trial.”  

For example, the Alien Enemies Act, which was made into law in 1798 and is still in place today, authorizes the US president to “arrest, detain, and remove civilians who are subjects or citizens of countries that the United States is at war with, or that pose a threat of invasion or attack, without any individualized determination that they pose a danger to the United States.”

**Abu Ghraib and Unexceptional Brutality**

The infamous Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal provides one look into how the violent and brutal detention practices used during the War on Terror are not as “exceptional” as they might first appear, and by extension, suggests that the post-9/11 state of exception as a whole

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242 Saito, “Indefinite Detention,” 35.
243 Saito, “Indefinite Detention,” 35.
may also be less “exceptional.” Abu Ghraib was a US Army detention center outside of Baghdad that operated from 2003 to 2006.\textsuperscript{244} In 2004, it was revealed that US prison guards had been abusing and torturing detainees at Abu Ghraib, perpetrating a range of sadistic acts constituting sexual abuse, sexual humiliation, physical violence, and electric torture; the guards filmed and/or photographed a number of these acts, with a number of images later discovered on a CD.\textsuperscript{245}

In April 2004, an internal US Army investigation into the abuse was conducted by Major General Antonio Taguba; he authored a report that was quickly leaked to the public and covered in-depth in a New Yorker article by Seymour Hersh published on April 30, 2004.\textsuperscript{246} Two days before, CBS had broadcast several images depicting the abuse on their show 60 Minutes II.\textsuperscript{247} There was significant backlash to the photos, on both a domestic and a global scale; a poll conducted shortly after the photos were released found that close to 75% of Americans thought that “the mistreatment of the detainees was unjustified under any circumstances.”\textsuperscript{248} Interestingly though, another poll conducted around the same time revealed that only 29% of Americans “considered what American soldiers did to prisoners there to be torture;” at this time 72% of Americans claimed to believe that torture was “always wrong, even in the case of war against terrorists.”\textsuperscript{249} The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal also caused Bush’s approval rating to drop

\textsuperscript{245}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{246}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247}Ibid.
to 46% (the lowest of his presidency at that point), and for only 44% of Americans to say that the war in Iraq was still worthwhile.\textsuperscript{250}

The Bush administration worked hard to portray the abuse/torture committed at Abu Ghraib as the work of “a few bad apples;” revealing once again the alliance between the media and the Bush administration, CBS waited two weeks to release their story on Abu Ghraib, “at the request of the Pentagon.”\textsuperscript{251} There are major issues with the “few bad apples” narrative. For one, as Avery F. Gordon (2006) reminds us, things like “torture, humiliation, degradation, sexual assault… always have been part of US prison culture and behavior.”\textsuperscript{252} Saito points out that US Army reservist Charles Graner, who is considered the “architect” of the abuse that occurred at Abu Ghraib, was previously a prison guard at a maximum security prison in Pennsylvania, where he, along with other (mostly white) guards terrorized the predominantly Black prison population with beatings, sexual assaults, and racial epithets.\textsuperscript{253} Gordon thus asserts that “The Abu Ghraib photographs exposed the dehumanisation that is the modus operandi of the lawful, modern, state-of-the-art prison.”\textsuperscript{254} In other words, the violence perpetrated at Abu Ghraib can be understood as an export of the US prison system.

The Abu Ghraib pictures were a blatant and graphic refutation of American exceptionalism; they left the viewer with no choice but to concede that the US was not, in reality, always a moral actor or a “force for good.” I believe that the existence of visual evidence of the abuse/torture can help explain why there was fairly significant backlash in response to the Abu

\textsuperscript{250} Drash, “Abu Ghraib Photos.”
\textsuperscript{251} Tarrow, “War, States, and Contention,” 159.
\textsuperscript{253} Saito, “Indefinite Detention,” 47.
\textsuperscript{254} Gordon, “Abu Ghraib,” 49.
Ghraib scandal, but considerable support for the administration’s detention practices and “exceptional” policies, more broadly.

Public Support for the State of Exception

It is important to discuss support among the American public for the policies instituted by the US government in the wake of 9/11 that further entrenched a state of exception. In January 2002, 55% of Americans polled said that it would be “necessary for the average person to give up some civil liberties” in order to prevent future terrorist attacks, compared to only 39% who did not believe it to be necessary.\(^{255}\) At this same time, 65% of those polled said they supported the use of military tribunals (as opposed to US criminal courts) to try suspected terrorists.\(^{256}\)

Public support for detention centers like Guantanamo Bay was also notably high during the height of the War on Terror, as well as later on, under the Obama administration. From 2007 to 2014, Gallup asked Americans as to whether or not they thought the military prison at Guantanamo Bay should be closed down. In 2007, 53% said that Guantanamo Bay should remain open; seven years later, that number had risen to 66%, with 29% of those polled saying it \textit{should} be closed and with 5% having no opinion.\(^{257}\) For comparison, in 2007, 13% of those polled had reported having no opinion on the matter.\(^{258}\)

The widespread support that has been observed for the opening and maintenance of Guantanamo Bay is neither anomalous nor unprecedented, especially when one takes into account past public reactions to wartime detentions (particularly those of a racialized nature). In December, 1942, a year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and several months after the US government had first began forcibly relocating Japanese-Americans to internment camps, 48% of

\(^{255}\)Hartig & Doherty, “Two Decades Later.”

\(^{256}\)Ibid.


\(^{258}\)Ibid.
Americans contended that those incarcerated “should not be allowed to return to the Pacific coast after the war.” 259 Only 35% said that they should be allowed to return. 260

There has been much debate as to whether or not large portions of the American public support the usage of torture under certain circumstances. A poll performed in 2015, for example, found that the US was one of only twelve countries (out of forty surveyed) where the majority of the public deemed it justifiable to engage in torture in cases where its use could help to “gain information about a possible attack.” 261 Interestingly, however, a 2005 Gallup poll revealed the opposite, with 56% of Americans saying “they would not be willing to have the U.S. government torture suspected terrorists who had information about future attacks;” at this time, around 75% of those polled reported that they thought US military and government officials had been engaging in torture of prisoners in Iraq and other countries. 262

Conclusion

The implications and long-term effects of the US government’s post-9/11 policies are wide-ranging and difficult to overstate. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may have ended, but the War on Terror, both as a kind of mass state of mind and as an actual violent enterprise, lives on, and the US continues to actively involve itself in the Middle East’s affairs. The toll the War on Terror has taken on millions of lives all over the globe is staggering. As of September 2021, the War on Terror has cost the US approximately $8 trillion and has killed more than 900,000

260 Ibid.
261 Hartig & Doherty, “Two Decades Later.”
Importantly, this figure only includes those who died as a “direct result of war, whether by bombs, bullets or fire;” the War on Terror has led to countless other deaths, often as a result of “disease, displacement and lack of access to food or clean drinking water.” In fact, a conservative estimate of the number of people who have been displaced by the War on Terror is around 38 million; this number may actually be closer to 60 million. In Iraq alone, 9.2 million people have been displaced, and between 275,000 and 306,000 people have died directly as a result of the war.

Moreover, while some things have changed, many others have not. From 2018 to 2020, the US was involved in counterterrorism activities in 85 different countries, revealing how, in many respects, the War on Terror has expanded rather than diminished. And despite Obama’s pledge, Guantanamo Bay remains open to this day; as of January, 39 men are still imprisoned there, 27 of whom have never been charged with a crime. Additionally, to this day, no one has been held responsible for the CIA’s RDI program, and the US Senate Intelligence Committee’s 2014 “Torture Report,” excluding brief, heavily redacted excerpts, is still classified.

During Obama’s presidency, drone strikes (which are often covert and concealed from the public) emerged as a major area of concern in the War on Terror. Under the Obama

264 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
269 Tayler & Epstein, “Legacy of the ‘Dark Side.’”
administration, the US executed 563 drone strikes, about ten times as many as under Bush.\footnote{Tayler & Epstein, “Legacy of the ‘Dark Side,’” 20.} Drone strikes have repeatedly been found to kill high numbers of civilians in addition to the militants who are being targeted—far more civilians than the US government is usually willing to admit.\footnote{Ibid.} In fact, the \textit{Bureau of Investigative Journalism} estimates that 1,551 civilians have been killed by US drone strikes since 2004 in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen.\footnote{“US Deadly Drone Strikes,” Amnesty International UK, May 18, 2021, \url{https://www.amnesty.org.uk/thank-you-us-deadly-drones}.} Fortunately, however, according to \textit{The Costs of War Project}, in Biden’s first year in office, it does appear that he has “dramatically curtailed drone strikes and apparent civilian casualties.”\footnote{Tayler & Epstein, “Legacy of the ‘Dark Side,’” 20-21.}

It is also noteworthy that despite public backlash to the Iraq War and other dimensions of the War on Terror, belief in American exceptionalism does not appear to be waning. As of 2021, according to the \textit{Public Religion Research Institute}, only 41\% of Americans said that “there has ever been a time when they were NOT proud to be American;” in 2013, this percentage was somewhat significantly lower (31\%) however.\footnote{PRRI Staff, “Competing Visions of America: An Evolving Identity or a Culture Under Attack? Findings from the 2021 American Values Survey,” PRRI, November 3, 2021, \url{https://www.prri.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/}.} Relatedly, 74\% of Americans still agree (mostly or completely) that “America has always been a force for good in the world.”\footnote{Ibid.} There does, however, seem to be a shift occurring in regards to the more religious dimensions of American exceptionalism. In 2013, 64\% of Americans claimed to agree that “God has granted America a special role in human history;” that number has now dropped twenty percentage points, with only 44\% agreeing with the above statement, as of 2021.\footnote{Ibid.}

Essentially, while American society is certainly not the same as it was twenty years ago, there is little to indicate that the War on Terror has any sort of expiration date. Instead, we do

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\footnotetext[1]{Tayler & Epstein, “Legacy of the ‘Dark Side,’” 20.}
\footnotetext[2]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[3]{“US Deadly Drone Strikes,” Amnesty International UK, May 18, 2021, \url{https://www.amnesty.org.uk/thank-you-us-deadly-drones}.}
\footnotetext[4]{Tayler & Epstein, “Legacy of the ‘Dark Side,’” 20-21.}
\footnotetext[6]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[7]{Ibid.}
\end{footnotesize}
indeed seem to be engaged in a permanent war—a war that has become increasingly covert, but a war that is ongoing, nonetheless. Moreover, at this point, many have simply become accustomed to the key facets of homeland security state, and as such the everyday violences of the War on Terror, whether they occur here or abroad, largely go unquestioned. For the War on Terror to truly end, both the government and the public will have to engage in a radical reevaluation of not just individual policies, but of the very structure of the War on Terror itself, and of the history that led up to it.
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