The Bush Administration’s Decision to Invade Iraq: The Question of Rationality and Groupthink

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Abstract

There has been extensive scholarly debate regarding the American-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Much research has focused on the effects of the Iraq War and a great deal of debate and speculation has centred on the Bush Administration’s motives for war. Nevertheless, there has been little use of theory based analysis on the actual decision to invade Iraq. Existing scholarship has placed little focus on the rationality of the decision to invade and there has been limited research as to whether groupthink was present and influenced decision-making within the Bush Administration. This dissertation seeks to fill this academic void. In Chapter 1 it tests whether the decision to invade was a rational decision using the Rational Actor Model. Any parts of the decision deemed not to be rational gives impetus for the use of the Groupthink model in Chapter 2 to investigate whether groupthink influenced policy processes leading up to the decision to invade. Hence, questions of rationality and groupthink within this dissertation are linked. By analysing rationality, research also touches upon irrationality, aiming to discover whether there were elements of irrationality in the decision to invade Iraq and/or the policy processes leading up to invasion.

This dissertation finds that the invasion of Iraq was not a rational decision and that groupthink was present and actively influenced policy processes within the Bush Administration. With regards to irrationality, it finds that the actual decision to invade Iraq was not irrational due the Administration’s bounded rationality. Nevertheless, research finds that this bounded rationality stemmed from irrational actions carried out during the policy processing in an environment affected by groupthink.
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Introduction

The sound of incoming American Tomahawk missiles into Baghdad on March 20, 2003 signalled the start of the Iraq War and the subsequent American ground-troop presence in the country. However, the bombing of Baghdad and advancement of U.S.-led troops into Southern Iraq also portrayed the outcome of many months of policy processing within President George W. Bush’s Administration over which method of action would advance U.S. goals in Iraq and the Middle East. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration’s goals in the Middle East became centred on defeating terrorism, halting Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme and spreading democracy throughout the region as explicitly stated in the National Security Strategy 2002 (NSS 2002).¹ Iraq’s perceived WMD capabilities, its history of humanitarian violations, its defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and its perceived links to al-Qaeda were seen as challenges to the Bush Administration’s goals in the region.² They therefore saw invasion – the political use of force – as the best way to advance their goals.³ This research project will ask whether the decision to invade was a rational decision. It will do so by assessing whether the Administration succeeded in fulfilling its goals by invading Iraq. It will also assess whether any goals not reached were due to groupthink affecting policy processes. These considerations are central to this project and have been formulated into two research questions which will be

¹ White House. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Washington, DC.: White House, 2002. www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf Employing the Rational Actor Model allows us to assess the Bush Administration as unitary actor representative of the interests of the United States of America. Discourse analysis on speeches made by members of the Bush Administration has established that the Bush Administration’s primary goals in the Middle East centred around defeating terrorism, halting Iraq’s development of WMDs and promoting democracy throughout the Middle East. Empirical evidence to back up the assertions regarding the Bush Administration’s goals will be presented and analysed in Chapter 1. Dina Badie claims that 9/11 created a shift in the Bush Administration’s perception of Iraq. This will be discussed in Chapter 2.


³ Blechman, Barry, & Kaplan, Stephen. Force Without War: The US Armed Forces as a Political Instrument. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1978. p.12. Blechman and Kaplan defined the political use of force as ‘physical actions taken by one or more components of the uniformed armed military services as part of a deliberate attempt by the national authorities to influence or be prepared to influence, specific behaviour of individuals in another nation without engaging in a continuing contest of violence.’
elaborated below. Firstly though, the structure of this research project will be presented in order to better understand the context in which the research questions have been formulated.

This research project will include an introduction, two analytical chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 will analyse the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq while Chapter 2 will assess whether the Bush Administration fell victim to groupthink. It will therefore engage in qualitative case study analysis focusing on discourses emanating from the Bush Administration. This will allow exploration of the Bush Administration through multiple conceptual lenses and allow multiple facets of understanding to be examined and understood. Analysis will also make use of quantitative methods in Chapter 1, converting statistics into graphs to present the number of terrorist attacks that have occurred since the invasion of Iraq. The use of such methods will aid analysis in answering whether the Bush Administration succeeded in defeating terrorism. This is nevertheless the only instance where quantitative methods will be used. Case studies within qualitative research in political science often adopt a research process depicted in the shape of an hourglass. That is, the top of the hourglass represents the establishment of a broad theoretical discussion and structural framework usually in the form of a literature review. Analysis is then honed in on the research questions within the epicentre of the hourglass before opening up again towards the end where the results of the case study are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. This research project will not adopt such a structure as two different theoretical models will be used to answer two separate research questions. The Rational Actor Model (RAM) will be used in Chapter 1 to analyse the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq while the groupthink model will be used in Chapter 2 to test whether groupthink influenced policy processes leading up to

6 Ibid.
the decision to invade Iraq. If one were to adopt the hourglass model, this would mean clumping the RAM and groupthink together in a literature review and analysis. Such a process would restrict epistemology, lead to generalisations and obscure possible findings. Thus both chapters will form their own hourglass structure, starting with a literature review discussing their respective theoretical models and their relation to the research question. This will then be followed by an analysis and then a conclusion at the end of the chapters discussing the findings of the research questions. Both chapters are nevertheless intricately linked. The findings from Chapter 1 will present answers that will be used as a basis for analysis in Chapter 2. Outcomes of Chapter 1 will also raise questions that will be taken up and analysed in Chapter 2. This structure has been designed to make analysis of each model more rigorous and allow the research questions to flow into each other. In other words, findings of Chapter 1 will flow into formulating questions in Chapter 2. Such an approach would not be possible were one to design the whole research project into one single hourglass structure.

The intent of Chapter 1 will be to assess whether the invasion of Iraq was a rational decision. The research question used to answer this will ask to what extent the Bush Administration maximised its goals by invading Iraq, using the Rational Actor Model (RAM) to analyse whether the decision to invade was a rational one. Using the benefit of hindsight, empirical evidence of the current situation in Iraq and the use of secondary sources, research will put the Bush Administration’s goals to the test, using the RAM to see if outcomes of the Iraq War maximised the Bush Administration’s goals. Research will specify that any decision deemed not to advance specified goals will therefore be determined as non-rational and hence be considered a failure. Since we are dealing within the realms of foreign policy, such failures will be deemed foreign policy failures. If found not to be a rational decision, research will

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7 This will be theoretically specified and backed up through the application of the RAM in Chapter 1.
also ask whether this makes for an irrational decision or merely a failed prediction based on bounded empirical evidence. Any goals not reached and hence considered failures will provide ground for Chapter 2 to assess why these failures occurred. The intent of Chapter 2 will therefore be to answer whether groupthink affected policy processes within the Bush Administration. The research question in Chapter 2 will thus ask to what extent groupthink shaped decision-making processes within the Bush Administration. If groupthink was present, research will also ask whether groupthink led to irrational actions during the decision-making process, such as purposefully limiting data to process cost-benefit calculations.

Nevertheless, one must also ask why the research questions in Chapters 1 and 2 are significant. The invasion of Iraq has had large political, economic, security and social implications for Iraq, the United States, the Middle East and the rest of the world.8 With the formal withdrawal of U.S. troops completed in late 2011, America’s financial cost has been estimated to be at around $5 trillion.9 Furthermore, the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in northern Iraq and parts of Syria have been argued to be partly due to the power vacuum left behind in the absence of a strong centralised governmental authority and the lack of American planning for a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.10 It therefore becomes an imperative to analyse whether the option of invasion was the option that best fulfilled the Bush Administration’s goals, maximising their utilities. If utilities were not maximised, then the decision to invade becomes highly contentious. Assessing whether groupthink affected

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9 Stiglitz, Joseph. (2008). ‘The $3 Trillion War’. *New Perspectives Quarterly.* Vol.25, No.2. p.63. Stiglitz cites conservative estimates of the war being $3 trillion as ‘unimaginable’, claiming instead that a more realistic estimate ‘closer to $5 trillion once you include all the downstream “off-budget costs” of longterm veteran benefits and treatment, the costs of restoring the now-depleted military to its pre-war strength, the considerable costs of actually withdrawing from Iraq and repositioning forces elsewhere in the region’.
policy processes and distorted decision-making can help us understand how and why these non-rational decisions were taken and help develop active measures to prevent such scenarios from being repeated.\textsuperscript{11} Furthermore, conclusions on the rationality of the decision to invade can give impetus for further investigations asking what could have been done differently with regards to Iraq. Should research find that invasion did not rationally maximise the Bush Administration’s goals, this should serve as caution in assessing what can be done in regard to present events in Syria and Iraq.

This research project has chosen to use the RAM and groupthink because they can be applied and tested on empirical data such as discourses. While the incorporation of other theories such as Marxism would allow for the project to speculate about other American objectives for invading Iraq such as attempts to reassert its hegemonic power through unilateralism; research will draw evidence from empirical material such as speeches and government documents.\textsuperscript{12} This will allow for concrete empirical statements to be analysed. The project recognises debates regarding the legality of the invasion of Iraq such as the ongoing ‘Iraq Inquiry’.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, this project seeks to analyse the Bush Administration’s decision to invade and not the legality of the action that emanated from the decision. In this way, the project can solely focus on decision-making and not get drawn into debates regarding questions on international law and norms. The project also acknowledges the contention of proposing the spread of democracy as a core goal of the Bush Administration in the Middle East. Various scholars argue that this rationale was secondary to the goals of combating terrorism and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\end{thebibliography}
stopping the proliferation of WMDs and only gained currency after the invasion. Arguments questioning the legitimacy of the goal of spreading democracy in the Middle East will be touched upon. Nevertheless, discourses from the Bush Administration prior to invasion conveyed democracy in Iraq and the Middle East as an objective. The legitimacy of the project would be damaged were it to neglect discourses expressing this goal in favour of debates questioning its viability. Chapter 1 will therefore test the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq to achieve democracy. If research finds that the decision were to be a non-rational one, this can perhaps supplement future studies questioning the legitimacy of the democracy rationale.

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Chapter 1 – The Rationality of the Decision to Invade Iraq

Literature Review

The rational choice approach to politics infers that rational individual actors are motivated by self-interest and utility maximisation in order to achieve their goals. Milton Friedman defined rationality as the act of ‘balancing costs against benefits to arrive at an action that maximizes personal advantage’. Martin Seymour Lipset notes that ‘people seek ego gratification – that is their goal or end’. Chapter 1 will use Allison and Zelikow’s RAM outlined in their seminal work *Essence of Decision 2nd Edition* as the baseline for analysis. Analysis of the Administration’s rationality will be based on the RAM’s premise that it was a unitary actor with purposive goals. Research will supplement the RAM’s baseline analysis with Herbert Simon’s concept of *bounded rationality*. This will allow research to take into account the realities of human rationality and its limitations of knowledge. Simon notes that bounded rationality allows us to denote behaviour that is ‘appropriate to specified goals in the context of a given situation’. Therefore, in order to understand the Bush Administration’s decision to invade Iraq, ‘we have to deal with the realities of human rationality, that is, with

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21 Ibid.
bounded rationality’. 23

Research will embark from the RAM’s assumptions that agent’s decisions are made based on ‘preference-maximising behaviour’, choosing options with overall higher net-gain.24 These will be key requisites in analysing the Bush Administration’s rationality. Thus, by establishing RAM as the baseline for analysis, research will start from the premise that foreign policy decisions are taken to maximise utilities by fulfilling goals set by cost-benefit rationality.25 Through the RAM, the Bush Administration selected ‘the alternative whose consequences [were] preferred in terms of [their] utility function’ and that they selected ‘each sets of consequences in order of preference’.26 The Bush Administration’s choice of invading Iraq was therefore the alternative ‘whose consequences [ranked] highest in the decision maker’s payoff function’.27 This assumption consequently allows research to define foreign policy failure as decisions taken that do not maximise the decision maker’s payoff function. Failure therefore occurs when goals are not reached and utilities are not rationally maximised.

This project seeks to create a theoretical paradigm, synthesising Allison and Zelikow’s RAM and Simon’s concept of bounded rationality. It disregards Simon’s other type of rationality, namely comprehensive rationality.28 Its assumptions that an analyst only needs to know the ‘choosing organism’s goals and the objective characteristics of the situation’ and consequently take into account ‘absolutely nothing else about the organism’, would limit overall scope of analysis.29 It would disregard inescapable limitations of human knowledge and axiomatically consider the Bush Administration as fully informed decision-makers which

24 Ibid.
25 Yetiv, Steven A. p.3
26 Ibid.
27 Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip. p.18
29 Ibid.
this project will show, was not the case.\textsuperscript{30} Such a premise would also lead to a faulty conclusion that any decision not deemed rational must therefore be irrational, since the decision-makers are fully informed about the costs and benefits of every potential decision. By incorporating Allison and Zelikow’s cost-benefit rational analysis and fusing it with Simon’s bounded rationality, boundaries can be set and focus can be placed on assessing whether the decision to invade Iraq outweighed the costs of doing so. This will allow for an ‘analytical paradigm’ to be implemented, producing a systematic statement of basic assumptions, concepts and propositions in order to pursue the analysis.\textsuperscript{31} Research is therefore allowed to embark from the assumption that the Bush Administration saw the invasion of Iraq as the option with the lowest perceived costs and the best option to maximise goals within their bounded environment.

However, this also leads us to ask, if a decision is deemed not to be rational, does it automatically become an \textit{irrational} decision? As previously mentioned, human rationality is bounded by different types of variables and circumstances. Geoffrey Vickers explains that bounded rationality ‘implies that facts are relevant only in relation to some judgement of value and judgements of values are operative only in relation to some configuration of fact’.\textsuperscript{32} Rather than label actors who misinterpret a situation as simply irrational, one must also take into account the values, stereotypes and beliefs of the decision-maker, irrespective of whether these views may be correct.\textsuperscript{33} If the research takes into account that the Bush Administration’s rationality was bounded, what then constitutes an irrational decision? Jonathan Cohen argues that ‘ordinary human reasoning - cannot be held to be faultily programmed [as] it sets its own

\textsuperscript{30} Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip. p.20
standards’. These standards must therefore be enshrined in a normative theory which ‘is itself acceptable only so far as it accords, at crucial points, with the evidence of untutored intuition’. Human reasoning sets its own standards and so in order to measure reasoning objectively, a normative theory based on untutored intuition needs to be used – a theory that simply does not exist. This poses a problem for the analysis in determining whether the Bush Administration’s decision to invade Iraq can be considered irrational if empirical analysis finds that aspects of their decision-making were not rational. Without a coherent definition of what an irrational decision might constitute, how can one seek to test whether a non-rational decision is irrational?

What can be established so far is that a decision made that does not maximise goals and therefore – according to the established premises – cannot be classified as rational, does not necessarily make it irrational. It can merely be a failed prediction based on the bounded variables available to the decision-maker. With regards to the identification of an irrational decision, the research project will side with Sebastian Gardner’s analysis of irrationality which refutes Cohen’s restrictive premises, arguing instead that irrationality involves ‘the motivated failure of self-knowledge’. This failure of self-knowledge can be characterised by akrasia and self-deception. Akrasia, defined by David Owens as the ability to control action and analytical judgement but fail to exercise that ability, leads to an irrational decision. Research will thus define irrationality as a blend of self-deception and akrasia, leading to a failure of self-knowledge. The question that arises from this is whether the actual decision to

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36 Cohen, Jonathan L. p.333
invade Iraq was an instance of irrationality and/or whether the decision-making processes that led to that decision being taken was irrational. The outcome of the decision to invade Iraq will be analysed in Chapter 1 and the decision-making process leading to the decision to invade will be analysed in Chapter 2.

The Bush Administration – Rational Decision Makers?

Research will now analyse whether the decision to invade Iraq was a rational one by asking to what extent the Bush Administration maximised its goals by invading Iraq. The RAM asserts the rational foreign policy makers have objectives in which their strategic goals are conceived.\(^{40}\) They then assess their options for advancing these objectives, assessing the consequences of a proposed action.\(^{41}\) The rational agent will then make a choice that is value-maximising, whose consequences rank highest in achieving specified goals and objectives.\(^{42}\)

Assessing the NSS 2002 and speeches from President Bush and members of his administration between September 11, 2001 and March 17, 2003 has led this analysis to establish three national security goals designed to promote U.S. national interests worldwide. These goals consisted of defeating terrorism, promoting democracy and stopping the development of WMDs.\(^{43}\)

The Bush Administration’s method for achieving their goals was explicitly stated in the NSS 2002 as through action.\(^{44}\)

The Bush Administration’s three goals of defeating terrorism, promoting democracy in the Middle East and preventing the production of WMDs will now be analysed based on the

\(^{40}\) Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip. p.24
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002. p.ii. ‘As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed’.
analytical paradigm established earlier. The overall aim will be to answer whether the
decision to invade Iraq was down to rational thinking and a utility maximising-response to
clear threats. Any goal not reached will not maximise the Bush Administration’s utilities and
therefore be considered a non-rational decision and hence a failure in trying to maximise that
certain goal. Since our analytical paradigm has established that any decision that does not
maximise a decision-maker’s payoff function can therefore be considered a foreign policy
failure, research can also establish that any foreign policy goals not reached can be considered
foreign policy failures. Any goals not maximised will lead the dissertation to analyse in the
next chapter why the decision to go to war was made and whether the decision-making
process can be considered irrational.

Goal 1 – Defeat Terrorism

‘The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration. America will help nations
that need our assistance in combating terror. And America will hold to account nations that are compromised by
terror, including those who harbor terrorists - because the allies of terror are the enemies of civilization.’

In an address before a Joint Session of Congress nine days after the attacks, President Bush
declared that the War on Terror would not end ‘until every terrorist group of global reach has
been found, stopped and defeated’. Jeremy Pressman argues that this allowed for the war on
terror to expand beyond the terms of simply destroying al-Qaeda. In the new post-9/11
world, ‘the only path to peace and security (was) the path of action’. Nevertheless, the first
step to achieving this goal was to focus on destroying al-Qaeda and the invasion of Iraq was

46 Bush, George W. ‘Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the
Terrorist Attacks of September 11. September 20, 2001’. in Public Papers of the President of the United States:
47 Pressman, Jeremy. p.153
seen as the best method to achieve this since according to the NSS 2002, Iraq ‘sponsored terrorism around the globe’.\textsuperscript{49} Research will define terrorism using David Rapoport’s concept of \textit{Four Waves of Modern Terrorism}, using the fourth wave – Islamic fundamentalism – as scope for analysis.\textsuperscript{50} The Bush Administration’s goal of defeating ‘the global terror network’ therefore implies the defeat of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, in order to set boundaries in the use of graphs, the research will analyse attacks committed by Al-Qaeda and its subsidiary groups. Research will also assess the rise of ISIL in post-war Iraq.

Robert Kagan argued in 2008 that ‘whatever else the Bush administration has failed to do, it has not failed to protect Americans from another attack on the homeland’.\textsuperscript{52} David Frum also argued in 2008 that in terms of the Bush Administration’s goals of defeating terrorism, the invasion of Iraq ensured this, arguing that ‘the U.S. homeland has enjoyed almost complete immunity from acts of international terrorism’.\textsuperscript{53} Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh further argue that the war in Iraq was declared to address the threats to \textit{American} security.\textsuperscript{54} A case can be put forward that if the goal of the Bush Administration was to stop terrorism from occurring on U.S. soil, then the decision to invade can be considered rational since it

\textsuperscript{49} National Security Strategy of the United States of America. 2002. p.14
\textsuperscript{51} Bush, George W. ‘Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11’.
maximised its utilities in ensuring that no Islamist terrorist attacks have occurred on U.S. soil since the invasion of Iraq.\textsuperscript{55} Data in \textit{Figure 1} gives weight to some of these claims.

![Figure 1](image)

\textbf{Figure 1: Number of attempted and successful terrorist attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda and its subsidiaries in the U.S., cataloguing 5 incidents from 1988 until 2013, with one attempted attack occurring between 2003 and 2013.}\textsuperscript{56}

Nevertheless, this research asserts the Bush Administration viewed the threat of Islamist terrorism as a global one rather than solely threat to the U.S. In a State of Union Address on January 29, 2002, President Bush explicitly stated that the terrorists viewed ‘the entire world as their battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are’.\textsuperscript{57} He furthermore stated that the United States ‘must prevent terrorists and regimes – from threatening the United States

\textsuperscript{55} Lynch, Timothy J. & Singh, Robert S. p.114. The involvement of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009 has put these authors’ claims into question.

\textsuperscript{56} National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2013). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Accessed December 3, 2014. http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd. Perpetrators include Al-Qa’ida; Al-Qa’ida for SouthWestern Khulna Division; Al-Qa’ida in Lebanon; Al-Qa’ida in Saudi Arabia; Al-Qa’ida in Iraq; Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); Al-Qa’ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM); Al-Qa’ida Organization for Jihad in Sweden; Al-Qa’ida in Yemen. The involvement of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009 is shown in the graph. However since this attempt by AQAP did not result in a direct attack and result in casualties, analysis can conclude that no direct terrorist attacks have been carried out by Al-Qa’ida on American soil since the invasion of Iraq.

This provides evidence that the Bush Administration aspired to defeat terrorism on a global level rather than a domestic one. Thus further analysis needs to be carried out to see if this was achieved.

Pressman observes that al-Qaeda as a movement is still present and capable of inflicting damage despite the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that al-Qaeda have been involved in more attacks between 2001 and 2013 than from 1995 to 2001 with deadly attacks having occurred in Britain, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Yemen since the 2003 invasion. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, al-Qaeda’s attacks worldwide remained low and stable up until 2001. Since then, it has increased at a high rate from 38 attacks between December 1992 and March 2003 to 1382 attacks between March 2003 and December 2013. Furthermore, data shows that there were no recorded al-Qaeda attacks in Western Europe and North America prior to 9/11. Since then, eleven attacks have been perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and its subsidiary groups, with six attacks having been committed after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 as can be seen in Figure 3. Based on a comprehensive survey of Islamist attacks in Western Europe from 1994 to 2007, Petter Nesser argues that Islamist terrorism ‘constitutes a growing and increasingly lethal threat’. Evidence increasingly suggests that rather than defeating terrorism, its growth has increased since the invasion of Iraq. Even though a case can be made that U.S. may have scattered and dispersed

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58 Ibid
59 Pressman, Jeremy. p.156
al-Qaeda after the invasion of Iraq, it can be argued that the terrorist organisation has become a source of inspiration for other Islamist terrorist organisations.\(^{63}\)

![Figure 2: Number of attempted and successful terrorist attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda and its subsidiaries worldwide, cataloguing 1420 incidents from 1988 until 2013.\(^{64}\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/27/opinion/27herbert.html?_r=0)

Indeed, considering the amount of foreign fighters presently fighting in Iraq, Daniel Byman et al. argue that many will return to their home countries with ‘increased fervour and a more coherent ideology’, which will provide useful knowledge for future attacks beyond Iraq.\(^{65}\) The Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) internal think tank, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) stated in January 2005 that Iraq had become a ‘breeding ground for terrorist and criminal activity’.\(^{66}\) Indeed, the NIC Chairman, Robert Hutchings conceded that Iraq had become ‘a magnet for terrorist activity’.\(^{67}\) Rather than deny terrorists sanctuary at every turn, Iraq has become a training ground for terrorist groups and part of its territory has been


annexed by religious extremists creating the ISIL.\textsuperscript{68} The fallout within present-day Iraq is substantial with ISIL controlling northern parts of Iraq and Syria. ISIL did not exist before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and was consequently formed partly in response to Western intervention in the region.\textsuperscript{69} ISIL’s self-declared leader and Caliph, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, was held captive by US forces in Iraq from 2005 to 2009, which can be argued to have helped shape his extreme and hostile views towards the West.\textsuperscript{70}

![Figure 3. Number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and its subsidiaries in Western Europe and North America, cataloguing 9 incidents between 1988 and 2013.\textsuperscript{71}]

Using the RAM, it can be seen that the costs of invading Iraq to defeat terrorism greatly outweigh the benefits of doing so. Evidence has shown that the Bush Administration did not maximise its goal of defeating terrorism by invading Iraq. Quite the contrary – data suggests that terrorism has increased on a global scale and parts of Iraq are subject to rule from ISIL.

With regards to al-Qaeda, Pressman argues that by becoming preoccupied with Iraq, the U.S.  

\textsuperscript{68} Pressman, Jeremy. p.153  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{71} National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2013)
helped it in two ways. Firstly, it drew attention away from the organisation. Secondly, the lawlessness that ensued in Iraq after the invasion created a new training ground as well as a ‘symbolic rallying cry’, inspiring others with similar beliefs and antagonism to the U.S. It can therefore be concluded that the option of invading Iraq yielded higher costs than benefits. Therefore the decision to invade in order to defeat terrorism can be considered a non-rational decision and consequently a foreign policy failure in achieving this goal.

**Goal 2 – Promote Democracy in the Middle East**

‘We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace, a peace that favours human liberty…And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent’.

In the NSS 2002, the Bush Administration laid out plans to create ‘conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty’. In a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 2002, President Bush explained that bringing democracy to Iraq would inspire ‘reforms through the Muslim world’. Vice President Cheney also asserted that invasion would allow for ‘freedom-loving peoples of the region [to] have a chance to promote the values that can bring lasting peace’. Empirical evidence from speeches show that there was a belief within the Bush Administration that the invasion of Iraq would not only bring about democracy in Iraq,

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72 Pressman, Jeremy. p.176
73 Ibid.
but also spread to other parts of the Middle East – a key national interest to the U.S.\textsuperscript{78} The Bush Administration therefore saw democracy in the Middle East as an objective that would maximise their utilities and saw invasion as the best method to achieve this. It is important to note that the rational goal of the Bush Administration was to transform the region and establish democracy in a manner compatible with the pursuit of American interests.\textsuperscript{79} Such interests included the free flow of oil and gas, military and commercial traffic through the Suez Canal, the security of regional allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, and cooperation in military, counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation matters.\textsuperscript{80}

Nevertheless, Marina Ottaway et al. argues that invasion resulted in an unequal push for democracy across the Middle East, concentrating mainly on non-allied states such as Iraq, Iran and Lebanon.\textsuperscript{81} Pressman also notes that the Administration applied much less pressure to its allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.\textsuperscript{82} Furthermore, the Bush Administration became caught up in a ‘conflict of interest problem’, with their short-term security goals repeatedly getting in the way of their long term pursuit of democracy.\textsuperscript{83} Imad Salamey and Frederics Pearson argue that U.S. prioritisation of Middle Eastern stability and security often overrode the attainment of support for democracy, contradicting the humanitarian rationale of bringing democracy to Iraq.\textsuperscript{84} This imbalance meant that there was no consistent and coherent foreign policy for the Middle East regarding the spread of democracy. It made the U.S. open to claims that it was simply using discourses of democracy

\textsuperscript{78} Pressman, Jeremy. p.154
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Pressman, Jeremy. p.160
to advance its security interests and punish its adversaries, rather than extending democratic rights universally to all Arab people.\textsuperscript{85}

Furthermore, Iraq’s political system - the result of a U.S. sponsored election process - is characterised by sectarianism and ethnic infighting.\textsuperscript{86} The first post-Saddam election in January 2005 for a 275-seat transitional National Assembly did not resolve the disputes within Iraq’s communities over new positions in the post-Saddam power structure.\textsuperscript{87} Sunni Arabs boycotted the elections, becoming heavily under-represented within government.\textsuperscript{88} By summer 2014, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s misrule had deeply alienated Iraq’s Sunnis and hollowed out its security services, making it much easier for the Sunni jihadist group ISIL to cross the border from Syria and capture a number of major Iraqi cities.\textsuperscript{89} Considering that discourses from the Administration prior to war established democracy as a goal, Rick Brennan argues that the Bush Administration did ‘very little planning for post-conflict stability and support operations’.\textsuperscript{90} The Administration’s decision to pursue ‘de-Baathification’, disband the Iraqi army and support Shi’ite rule with little focus on reconciliation on a national level has fuelled Sunni insurgency.\textsuperscript{91} This has resulted in lawlessness and misrule. Consequently, if the Bush Administration saw invasion as the best option to spread democracy, then this has clearly been a failure. The Bush Administration’s goal of spreading democracy and peace across the region through invasion has resulted in Iraq becoming a sanctuary and training ground for terrorists and anti-democratic forces.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Robinson, Linda. \textit{Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq}. New York: Public Affairs, 2008. p.8
http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/145562.pdf
\textsuperscript{88} Katzman, Kenneth. p.1
\textsuperscript{89} Brennan, Rick. (2014). Sunni Muslims make up around 20% of the Iraqi population.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Pressman, Jeremy. p.153
Nevertheless, it can be argued that it is still too early to assess whether the Bush Administration has achieved its goal of bringing democracy to the region. Oz Hassan points out that President Bush left a legacy of institutional construction after the invasion of Iraq, creating the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA), and the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA). This legacy has encouraged cooperation and may result in greater democratic initiatives in the future. Furthermore, some scholars argue that the invasion which toppled Saddam in 2003 psychologically empowered Arab opposition activists in other Arab countries who saw that it was possible to remove a dictator from power, culminating in the Arab Spring in 2011. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the invasion inspired the Arab Spring and whether these revolutions have guaranteed American interests. It is not even clear if democratic consolidation will take place in states such as Libya, Egypt, Syria and Tunisia following the revolutions in 2011. Moreover, the Obama Administration’s request of $758 million in 2009 to increase democracy and governance programmes in BMENA, resulting in an 89% increase in spending from the previous year provides quantitative data showing that much financial resources are being used to promote democracy in the region.

Using the RAM, analysis asserts that the Bush Administration saw invasion as the most utility-maximising option to achieve its goal – promoting democracy in the region. Nevertheless, with much political unrest and sectarian division in Iraq coupled with the rise of

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93 Hassan, Oz. p.45
95 Ibid.
ISIL in northern Iraq, it seems that this objective of spreading democracy has not been fulfilled. It can be speculated whether democracy may spread in the future. Whether this will have anything to do with the invasion of Iraq is questionable. Hypocritical American foreign policy also contributed to undermining the Administration’s objective of bringing democracy. This is supported by historical data showing that the U.S. provided billions of dollars in commodity credits and import loan guarantees to Iraq even following Hussein’s humanitarian atrocities of the Anfal genocide against the Kurds in 1988. Efforts aimed exclusively at U.S. enemies rather than authoritarian allies and the Administration’s propensity to work with dictators and its rejection of the democratically elected Hamas government contributed to bringing failure to bring democracy to the Middle East. The failure to reach this goal can lead the research to conclude that the invasion of Iraq to fulfil the goal of promoting democracy can be considered a foreign policy failure.

Goal 3 – Stopping the Development of WMDs

‘Today the gravest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons’.

It is important to note from the start that Bush’s goal of defeating terrorism and the goal of stopping the development of WMDs were deeply intertwined with regards to Iraq. As President Bush stated, ‘terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction

98 Hassan, Oz. p.45
are different faces of the same evil. Our security requires that we confront both’.\textsuperscript{102} This entanglement of rationales contributed to a blurring between al-Qaeda and the perceived threat of Iraq.\textsuperscript{103}

Prior to war, the Bush Administration had repeatedly asserted that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons as well as a nuclear weapon programme soon capable of producing nuclear warheads.\textsuperscript{104} President Bush explicitly stated in September 2002 that Iraq was ‘seeking a nuclear bomb and with fissile material could build one within one year’.\textsuperscript{105} Vice President Cheney also contended that Iraq was ‘aggressively pursuing a nuclear weapons programme and working to develop long-range ballistic missiles’.\textsuperscript{106} The National Intelligence Estimate’s (NIE) report in 2002 on Iraq’s WMD programme claimed that Iraq would have a nuclear bomb by the end of the decade, financing $3 billion a year towards its development.\textsuperscript{107} The Administration rationally conceived that the best way to stop these weapon programmes and stop any potential weapon proliferation to terror organisations would be through invasion.

Nevertheless, hindsight shows that no active WMDs were found and no running WMD programme was uncovered. The U.S. Intelligence Community’s report on the pre-war assessments on Iraq concluded that the 2002 NIE report ‘overstated’ intelligence reporting and ‘led to a mischaracterization of intelligence’.\textsuperscript{108} The Iraq Survey Group (ISG) concluded

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\textsuperscript{103} Pressman, Jeremy. p.155

\textsuperscript{104} Pressman, Jeremy. p.165


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in 2004 that there was evidence for the ‘pre-1991 Iraqi Nuclear Program but found that Iraq’s ability to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program progressively decayed after that date’. They went on to conclude that ‘Saddam Hussein ended the nuclear program in 1991 following the Gulf war’ and that the ISG ‘found no evidence to suggest concerted efforts to restart the program.’ Evidence seems to put the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq in order to achieve Iraqi disarmament into question. Since the ISG’s conclusions seem to point to the fact that Iraq’s WMD programme ended in 1991, the objective of stopping the development of WMDs had therefore already been achieved and thus did not require invasion. Nevertheless, the Bush Administration still publicly expressed that there was a threat from Iraqi WMDs and pressed ahead with invasion in order to eliminate this threat. The U.S. invested hundreds of billions of dollars financing the Iraq War and suffered more than 35,000 casualties. Even though Iraq possessed no nuclear weapons due to the success of sanctions, containment and vigilance by the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA), the Bush Administration still mobilised vast amounts of resources in its efforts to stop the development and proliferation of these weapons.

Pressman argues that the quest to eliminate Iraq’s WMDs through war can be considered a foreign policy failure since the U.S. spent immense resources going after non-existent WMDs in Iraq while Iran and North Korea advanced their nuclear programmes. Furthermore, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that both Iran and North Korea drew the conclusion that the U.S. could invade Iraq precisely because it had no effective nuclear deterrence to stop the

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110 Ibid.
111 Pressman, Jeremy. p.166
112 Pressman, Jeremy. p.165
113 Pressman, Jeremy. p.179
Americans. They therefore saw their best way of defending themselves as through speeding up their acquisition and development of their nuclear arsenals. Thus it seems that rather than stop the development of WMDs, the invasion of Iraq actually contributed to greater WMD development and proliferation. Iran’s growing nuclear capabilities has led to growing instability in the Middle East combined with its increasing confidence to influence the region due to the power vacuum left in Iraq.

Some observers speculate that while Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda had few connections, Iraq might have had incentives to provide WMD materials or weapons to terrorists to ensure quick disarmament. They therefore posit that invasion was the only viable means to concretely achieve disarmament while simultaneously stopping terrorist organisations gaining WMDs. Nevertheless, since the data has shown that Iraq did not possess a sufficient WMD arsenal to proliferate, a war to stop this proliferation becomes highly questionable. Assessing the rationality of the decision to stop the proliferation of Iraqi WMDs to terrorist organizations therefore becomes void since there were no Iraqi WMDs to begin with. Furthermore the 9/11 Commission stated that Osama bin Laden had been sponsoring anti-Saddam Islamists in Iraqi Kurdistan, and sought to attract them into an Islamic Army. Since al-Qaeda therefore perceived Hussein as an enemy rather than a partner, the notion that there was collaboration between Hussein and al-Qaeda to proliferate weapons also becomes highly contested.

It can therefore be concluded that the decision to eliminate the development and proliferation of WMDs through invasion was not a rational decision. The Bush Administration used a vast

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114 Wallerstein, Immanuel. p.90
115 Wallerstein, Immanuel. p.91
116 Ibid.
amount of financial and physical resources to stop the development of weapons that were never found. Since no terrorist attacks have been carried out with the use of Iraqi WMDs, one could argue that this can be considered a successful rational decision. Nevertheless, since there were no Iraqi WMDs to proliferate to terrorists in the first place, this decision also becomes non-rational one and can therefore be considered a foreign policy failure.

Non-rational or Irrational?

Having used the RAM to analyse whether the Bush Administration rationally maximised its goals by invading Iraq, it can be concluded that they did not achieve their three specified goals. Consequently, according to the parameters set out in this analysis, Chapter 1 can conclude that their decision to invade was not a rational one and therefore a foreign policy failure. However, another question arises; since the decision to invade was not rational, was it therefore irrational or a failed prediction due to their bounded rationality? Paul ‘t Hart notes that ‘processes and outcomes which appear irrational to ‘objective’ observers may in fact be functional from the point of view of individual members or even the entire group’. Since analysis takes into account that the Bush Administration was bounded in its rationality, the research can assert that the actual decision to invade Iraq based on the Administration’s available evidence, resulted in a failed prediction resulting from limited evidence. Nevertheless, scholars such as Dina Badie and former members of the Bush Administration such as chief counter-terrorism advisor Richard Clarke suggest that the Bush Administration purposefully bounded itself, restricting the flow of evidence on which to process its cost-

benefit rationality. Could it be that the Bush Administration rationally acted on the available information, but acted in an irrational manner in obtaining that rational information? Such a process would fit the criteria of irrationality involving akrasia and self-deception.

In order to assess whether the Bush Administration acted irrationally in obtaining information about Iraq, Irving Janis’ Groupthink model will be used in Chapter 2 to assess the psychological group dynamics within the Administration. Having established that the invasion was a foreign policy failure, groupthink will investigate why this failure occurred. Analysis on whether the Bush Administration fell victim to groupthink will help answer the question whether the Bush Administration limited available evidence and whether the process of purposefully bounding their rationality was irrational.

Chapter 2 – The Bush Administration and Groupthink

It has therefore been established through the application of the RAM that the Bush Administration did not maximise its goals by invading Iraq. Research thus confirms that the decision to invade Iraq was not a rational decision and a foreign policy failure. Nevertheless, it has also been established that the absence of rationality does not make it ipso facto irrational, since the Administration’s rationality was bounded. These conclusions set out two objectives for analysis in Chapter 2. The first objective will be to assess to what extent Irving Janis’ concept of Groupthink shaped the decision-making processes within the Bush Administration. If evidence finds that groupthink was present and affected decision-making processes, this makes for a second objective; to assess whether groupthink led to irrational actions during the decision-making process, such as purposefully limiting data on which to process cost-benefit calculations. Such actions would fulfil the criteria of motivated failure of self-knowledge, characterising irrationality. Janis argued that groupthink was likely to lead to ‘irrational and dehumanising actions directed against out-groups’. Thus the second objective will involve investigating whether this holds true for the Bush Administration. Hence, while Chapter 1 determined that the actual decision to invade Iraq was not irrational, Chapter 2 seeks to answer whether the Bush Administration fell victim to groupthink, purposefully leading to a limitation of data on which to process their rational calculations. Such actions would – using the previously specified criteria for irrationality - constitute irrational decision-making.

121 Gardner, Sebastian. p.2.
122 Janis, Irving L. p.13
This chapter will adopt the same structure as the previous one, starting with a literature review discussing groupthink and its applicability in foreign policy analysis. It will then go on to assess to what extent groupthink shaped the Bush Administration’s decision-making processes and assess whether groupthink led to irrational decision-making processes.

**Literature Review**

Allison and Zelikow argue that in order to understand and answer why different actors calculate expected utilities differently, we must turn our attention to factors that go beyond the boundaries of the RAM. Many analysts rely too heavily on the RAM, failing to recognize the importance of bureaucratic influences and organisational constraints. They argue that ‘what we see and judge – depends not only on the evidence available but also on the ‘conceptual lenses’ through which we look at evidence’. Since the RAM has established the Bush Administration’s goals were not maximised, analysis will now expand and ask why the decision the invade Iraq was taken. John Elster backs up this quest for a different theoretical perspective, raising questions about the validity of reducing a complex social entity such as the state into ‘a unitary actor, with stable values, beliefs and a capacity to carry out its decisions’. Indeed, Robert Jervis notes that units composed of many individuals with ‘diverging domestic interests and coalition dynamics’ results in less rational outcomes from group decisions rather than individual ones. Analysis of the Bush Administration requires taking into account internal bargaining, alternating coalitions pursuing differing goals and disagreements on how to reach goals. Such variables result in distorted decisions and the group not maximising its goals. Since the Bush Administration acted as a group in making the

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123 Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip. p.47
124 Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip. p.2
decision to invade Iraq, analysis of the group dynamics within the Administration becomes a viable method to pursue.

The concept of groupthink advanced by Irving Janis in his seminal work *Victims of Groupthink* provides a psychological group dynamic approach to political decision-making. It helps us explain why intelligent, experienced individuals produce defective policies when present within a group environment.\(^{128}\) It asserts that members involved in decision-making groups suffer pressures where realistic challenges are ignored and observations become distorted.\(^{129}\) Janis formally defined groupthink as ‘a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group – when members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action’.\(^{130}\) It refers to the ‘deterioration in mental efficiency, moral judgement and reality testing that result from in-group pressures’.\(^{131}\) Although groupthink itself could not be observed, it produces symptoms and behavioural traits that can be observed and avoided with proper planning.\(^{132}\) He argued that symptoms of groupthink represent ‘collective avoidance’ - a stress-induced reaction arising due to potential failure within a scenario.\(^{133}\) From analysis of historical case studies, Janis found that ‘groupthink tendencies sometimes [played] a major role in producing large-scale fiascos’.\(^{134}\)

Janis’ groupthink model asserts that within a provocative situational context, three major antecedent conditions emerge leading to the development of groupthink. The primary

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\(^{128}\) Badie, Dina. p.279.

\(^{129}\) Janis, Irving L. p.9

\(^{130}\) Ibid.

\(^{131}\) Ibid.


\(^{134}\) Janis, Irving L. p.192

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condition repeatedly found in his case studies of fiascos was *group cohesiveness*. A second major condition encountered was the degree of *insulation* of the decision-makers. The third condition increasing the chances of a consensus based on groupthink was the degree to which the *leader* of a cohesive policy-making group promoted his/her own preferred solution. These antecedent conditions are therefore argued to produce concurrence seeking tendencies that infringe on critical thinking, compelling individuals to internalise the group’s view and self-censor. Janis concluded that eight symptoms provide observable traits of this behaviour: (i) illusion of invulnerability; (ii) collective rationalisation; (iii) belief in the group’s inherent morality; (iv) stereotyped views of the enemy; (v) suppression of personal doubts; (vi) self-censorship; (vii) shared illusion of invulnerability and (viii) self-appointed mindguards. These symptoms of groupthink produce defective decision-making, resulting in low probability of successful outcomes. *Figure 4* illustrates the groupthink process, highlighting the symptoms of defective decision-making resulting from groupthink symptoms. Analysis in this chapter wishes to use these symptoms of groupthink and defective decision-making to analyse the Bush Administration. Figure 4 helps us understand that groupthink is most likely to occur when a ‘high degree of *group cohesiveness* is conductive to a high frequency of *symptoms of groupthink*, which in turn, are conductive to a high frequency of *defects in decision-making*’. 

Dina Badie argues that groupthink is essential in allowing us to understand the decision-making processes that led to the invasion of Iraq. Groupthink allows us to comprehend the

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136 Ibid. (Emphasis added).
137 Ibid.
138 Badie, Dina. p.279
139 Janis, Irving L. p.197-198
140 Janis, Irving L. p.13
141 Janis, Irving L. p.199 (Emphasis in the original).
142 Badie, Dina. p.278
Bush Administration’s inclusion of Iraq into its wider War on Terror. She argues that prior to the September 11 attacks; Saddam Hussein was regarded as an irrational actor and a regional tyrant but nevertheless a tyrant that posed no threat to American raison d’etat.  

Nevertheless sometime after September 11, a shift occurred. Hussein changed from being a troubling dictator to becoming an existential threat to American security. Badie argues that the decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror was ‘pathologically driven by groupthink in the post-9/11 environment, resulting in a flawed decision-making process and a

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\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Ibid.

\(^{145}\) Janis, Irving J. p.10, 197-198

\(^{146}\) Ibid.
shift in the Administration’s image of Iraq’s dictator’. Therefore according to Badie, there is great value in employing groupthink to understand the decision-making processes within the Administration. Groupthink will allow for the project to analyse how this dictator in the Middle East came to pose such a great threat to the United States and assess whether this was an irrational process.

However, there has been much debate and attempts to modify the applicability and reliability of Janis’ groupthink model. Scholars such as Jeanne Longley and Dean Pruitt argue that the groupthink model is seriously flawed; lacking empirical support and needing increased attention on the relationships among its variables. Furthermore, Paul ‘t Hart’s revision of groupthink led him to posit two different pathways of situational contexts in which groupthink can occur: (i) stress-induced cohesiveness leading members to view the group as a protective mechanism as emphasised in Janis’ original model, and (ii) situations considered by group members as opportunities, requiring rapid commitment and search for a strong common leader. These pathways allows for analysis to explain how different members of the group might have fallen prey in different ways to the groupthink pathology. Regarding the consequences of groupthink, Thomas Hensley and Glen Griffin also argue that Janis’ symptoms of defective decision-making are too few, resulting in ambiguity as to whether groupthink is actually at play. However, James Esser and Joanne Lindoerfer counter this claim stating that not all groupthink symptoms need to be present in order for groupthink to occur. They argue that in order to identify groupthink, we should focus instead on the

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147 Ibid.
149 ‘t Hart, Paul. p.181-193 (Emphasis added)
150 Badie, Dina. p.281
overall patterns of antecedents and symptoms, rather than the presence of each individual element.\textsuperscript{153} This is an important point since this analysis cannot attain a perfect account of decision-making processes within the Bush Administration. Elaboration on how analysis will adopt Esser and Lindoerfer’s assertions will be made further below.

Glen Whyte takes his critique of Janis’ groupthink model a step further arguing that groupthink should only use ‘t Hart’s second situational cluster and replace the primary antecedent condition, group cohesiveness, with group efficacy.\textsuperscript{154} He questions Janis’ view of concurrence-seeking as a response to stress, arguing instead that symptoms of groupthink are due to over confidence and excessive self-efficacy.\textsuperscript{155} Whyte’s version of groupthink model is an intriguing one, as it implies Bush Administration acted because of overconfidence rather than anxiety and stress. In order to assess his claims, exploration of the conditions surrounding the Bush Administration prior to invasion needs to be assessed. It needs to be determined whether the Bush Administration was driven by stress or overconfidence.

When President Bush began his presidency in 2001, the U.S. enjoyed unrivalled political and military power.\textsuperscript{156} Michael Cox and Doug Stokes argue that victories over fascism in 1945 and Communism in 1991, only confirmed to the Americans that they were no ‘ordinary country’ but rather a ‘City on the Hill’ – a universal model to be admired.\textsuperscript{157} Hence they argue that it was ‘almost certainly self-confidence born of successive victories over successive enemies’ that tempted the Bush Administration to go to war in Iraq.\textsuperscript{158} Nevertheless, Badie argues that

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{155} Whyte, Glen. p.190


\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
‘post 9/11 stress’ prompted a search for leadership in the wake of the terrorist challenge to American power.\textsuperscript{159} For Badie, ‘stress was an essential precondition to the emergence of groupthink within the Administration.\textsuperscript{160} CIA director Robert Gates stated that policy-makers seek a high degree of assurance before making a decision. However, if one expects another major attack, the ‘risk calculus’ changes substantially due to stress and anxiety.\textsuperscript{161} Furthermore, one must also question whether any possible overconfidence was based on insecurity.\textsuperscript{162} Such a scenario would conform to Janis’ original proposition. Melvyn Leffler argues that after 9/11, fear came to increasingly shape the Administration’s strategy, ‘elevating pre-emption to a new state of importance’, as explicitly stated in the Bush Doctrine.\textsuperscript{163} This foreign policy based on pre-emption is then one based on fear – a fear of future attacks.\textsuperscript{164} George Packer claims that Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz perceived Iraq as an ‘unfinished war’ and a sign of ‘American weakness’.\textsuperscript{165} Evidence seems to point to a confident Bush Administration, but a confidence based on insecurity, highlighted by its policy of pre-emption and post-9/11 stress.\textsuperscript{166} Analysis will thus discount Whyte’s claims and proceed from Janis’ premise that stress and anxiety fosters group cohesiveness which increases the possibility of groupthink occurring.

Nevertheless, Charles Ostrom and Brian Job argue challenge groupthink’s suitability to analysing policy processes, arguing instead that analysis should focus on ‘the American domestic context and in the context of [Bush’s] political leadership’ rather than group

\textsuperscript{159} Badie, Dina. p.283.
\textsuperscript{160} Badie, Dina. p.281
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Badie, Dina. p.283
dynamics. In essence, their argument is that domestic factors played a crucial role in explaining why Bush chose to go to war. Interestingly, they argue that as the state of the economy worsens the overall propensity to go to war increases, used as an attempt to distract the general public. Data shows that American economic growth had slowed prior to the invasion in 2003, displaying some public dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, Ostrom and Jobs’s model also argues the president will be less willing to go to war if there is public aversion to it. Prior to war, demonstrations took place both domestically and abroad expressing opposition to invasion. Over 200,000 people protested in San Francisco while 100,000 people protested in New York with over 10 million people protesting worldwide on February 15, 2003. Despite widespread protests and opposition, the Bush Administration still pressed ahead with war. Thus while Ostrom and Jobs’ model provides some compelling domestic factors for why Bush might have gone to war, it still lacks in certain areas and does not help to explain the group dynamics and decision-making within the Administration.

Thus, consistent with the literature, analysis will employ Irving Janis’ original groupthink model, basing analysis on the premise that the Bush Administration was a stress-induced cohesive in group. Analysis will present symptoms of groupthink and analyse whether these symptoms were present within the Administration and what effect they had on decision-making processes. Furthermore, it will make use of ‘t Hart’s pathways allowing us to account for how several pathways can lead to the same typology – determined by structural and individual circumstances. It will also use Esser and Lindoerfer’s assumptions that not all

168 Ostrom, Charles W. & Job, Brian L. p.548
170 Ostrom, Charles W. & Job, Brian L. p.546
172 Badie, Dina. p.280
groupthink symptoms need to be present in order to identify whether groupthink is occurring. Analysis will therefore – based on empirical evidence – focus on the most relevant symptoms of groupthink within Bush Administration and assess what effect this had on their decision-making and whether it led to irrational actions. The synthesis of Janis’ groupthink with these broader socio-psychological studies will allow analysis to find more solid ground and possess greater explanatory power in accounting for a phenomenon unique to small group dynamics.¹⁷³

### The Bush Administration - Victims of Groupthink?

‘I will go to my grave not knowing that. I can’t answer it. I can’t explain the strategic obsession with Iraq – why it rose to the top of people’s priority list’.¹⁷⁴

Analysis of the Bush Administration as a ‘group’ will refer to President Bush and his principal advisors along with other key members of his administration that came to play a key role in policy debate over Iraq. Such members will include: Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz, Secretary of State Colin Powell, NSC Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Stephen Hadley, Undersecretary of Defence Douglas Feith, Cheney’s Middle East advisor Richard Perle, Senior presidential advisor Karl Rove and CIA Director George Tenet. Analysis will also refer to individuals who had contact and access to the Bush Administration such as Chief counter-terrorism advisor Richard Clarke and Director of Policy Planning at the State Department, Richard Haass.

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¹⁷³ Badie, Dina. p.281
Before assessing whether groupthink symptoms were present within the Bush Administration, the antecedent conditions of groupthink - group cohesiveness, group insularity and the presence of leader promoting his own solution – need to be established. With regards to group insularity, James Mann argues that the policy processes involved with Iraq was controlled by a tightly controlled group of loyalists whom he terms as ‘Vulcans’.\(^\text{175}\) Richard Clarke claimed that group in and around the president was small, saying that Bush did not ‘reach out, typically, for a lot of experts. He [had] a very narrow, regulated, highly regimented set of channels to get advice’.\(^\text{176}\) President Bush himself claimed ‘I have no outside advice. Anybody who claims they’re an outside advisor of this Administration is not telling the truth – the only true advice I get is from our war council’.\(^\text{177}\) Thus there is evidence of group insularity. With regards to group cohesiveness and leadership, Badie argues that the hawks in the Administration such as Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Perle - members of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) favouring a permanent role for the U.S. in the Gulf - considered the group a ‘viable protective mechanism’.\(^\text{178}\) Surrounded by fellow neoconservatives who had all previously pressed for regime change in Iraq during George H.W. Bush’s presidency, they preyed on other members of the group such as Powell and Tenet via the internalisation of information and policies.\(^\text{179}\) After 9/11, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld took on promotional leadership, increasing the group’s susceptibility of groupthink in the wake of the stress and search for leadership left by events in 2001.\(^\text{180}\) The 9/11 attacks also brought inter-group rivalries to the fore, with the Bush Administration developing a distrust towards the defence community. The Administration felt that the CIA was failing to


\(^{176}\) Lemann, Nicholas. (2004).

\(^{177}\) Ibid.

\(^{178}\) Badie, Dina. p.281

\(^{179}\) Ibid.

\(^{180}\) Badie, Dina. p.283
‘connect the dots’ and that they should collect their own information, acting as a ‘smart
government’ that would ‘integrate all sources of information to see the enemy as a whole’.\textsuperscript{181} Barton Gellman also argues that Cheney acted as a powerful arbiter, making it his duty to
convince others in the administration of the threats posed by Saddam Hussein.\textsuperscript{182} Overall, such
characteristics point to the antecedent conditions of groupthink. Badie argues that ‘decision-
making process, stress, promotional leadership and intergroup conflict conduced groupthink
in the aftermath of 9/11 as members of the core group were under pressure to produce
effective policy in response to the attacks’\textsuperscript{183} The establishment of antecedent conditions
provides analysis with a platform to press ahead and analyse groupthink symptoms.

Symptoms of groupthink will be presented and assessed to see if they were prevalent within
the Bush Administration and produced symptoms of defective decision-making. Once this has
been done, we will ask whether these symptoms can help us determine whether the decision-
making processes within the Bush Administration were irrational.

**Overestimations:**

Janis argued that the illusion of invulnerability creates excessive optimism and encourages
extreme risk-taking while belief in the group’s morality led members to ignore moral and
ethical consequences of their decisions.\textsuperscript{184} Both these groupthink symptoms would result in
overestimations. The CIA warned that invasion could result in ‘a surge of global terrorism’,
the ‘territorial breakup’ of Iraq and severe strains in relations between the U.S. and its

\textsuperscript{181} National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. p.401
\textsuperscript{183} Badie, Dina. p.283
\textsuperscript{184} Janis, Irving L. p.197-198
European counterparts.\textsuperscript{185} War and occupation would foster an increase in political Islam and make Iraq into a magnet for extremists elsewhere in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{186} Despite these warnings, the Bush Administration dismissed these predictions and pressed for war.

**Illusion of Invulnerability**

Mann argues that the illusion of invulnerability was present within the Bush Administration, creating the idea of an ‘unchallengeable America – whose military power was so awesome that it no longer needed to make compromises or accommodations with any other nations or groups of countries’.\textsuperscript{187} Badie asserts that their illusion of invulnerability resulted in three indicators of defective policy: failures to assess and manage risks, contingency plans and objectives.\textsuperscript{188} Indeed, one of the biggest mistakes made by the Bush Administration in the lead up to war was its lack of foresight and planning.\textsuperscript{189} George Packer claims that the Administration’s ‘Plan A’ assumed that the Iraqi government would be quickly incapacitated, power would be handed over the Iraqi police and army, international troops would arrive and ‘most American forces would leave within a few months’.\textsuperscript{190} In essence, there was no ‘Plan B’ which according to former Director of the CIA George Tenet highlighted the Administration’s failed attempts to ‘seriously consider the implications of regime change’.\textsuperscript{191} President Bush’s ‘Mission Accomplished’ speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln less than 2 months after the invasion highlighted the Administration’s sole policy goal of regime change, giving little

\textsuperscript{187} Mann, James. p.xii
\textsuperscript{188} Badie, Dina. p.291
\textsuperscript{189} Rubin, James P. p.51.
\textsuperscript{190} Packer, George. p.118
\textsuperscript{191} Tenet, George. p.309
consideration to post-Saddam Iraq. Such actions highlight failures in assessing risks, forming contingency plans and managing objectives, which together consolidate the illusion of invulnerability that was present within the Bush Administration.

**Belief in Inherent Morality of the Group**

The Bush Administration’s belief in their inherent morality was consolidated with the inclusion of Iraq into its war on terror. Such actions created clear moral boundaries between the U.S. and the ‘enemy’, leading to a stereotyped view of enemy out-groups, reifying cultural biases and allowing the Bush Administration to publicly maintain an impression of morality. By justifying and formalising pre-emption within the NSS 2002 as a ‘moral imperative’ to national security, President Bush legitimised the invasion of Iraq within the wider War on Terror and thereby removed any moral preoccupations associated with national security. President Bush himself stated that ‘different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities’. The creation of dichotomies such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and ‘good’ versus ‘evil’, created a ‘self-other’ dichotomy, removing any moral responsibilities towards the enemy ‘with no precedent’, while simultaneously raising the American cause as a force for ‘good’ in the world. Such lack of morals and appreciation for the capabilities of the enemy resulted in their failure to anticipate Saddam Hussein’s partial compliance with UN demands, proving disastrous for Washington’s strategy for war which had been built on the assumption that Hussein would not comply. The fact that the U.S.

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193 Badie, Dina. p.292
194 Ibid. See also. National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002. p.21
195 Bush, George W. ‘Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York. June 1, 2002’.
196 Badie, Dina. p.292. See also. Bush, George W. ‘State of the Union Address to 107th Congress of the United States Capitol’.
197 Rubin, James P. p.47
would not even accept the Geneva Conventions with regards to Guantánamo showed that the Administration saw itself above the law of nations.\(^{198}\)

Hence it is clear that symptoms of groupthink such as the illusion of invulnerability and the belief in the inherent morality of the group were present within the Bush Administration. These symptoms resulted in over estimations in their capabilities and distortions in their perceptions of the ‘enemy’, leading to symptoms of defective decision-making such as failures to devise contingency plans and failures to develop clear objectives.

**Close mindedness:**

**Collective Rationalisation**

Janis defined collective rationalisation as ‘collective efforts to rationalise in order to discount warnings which might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions’.\(^{199}\) Incorporating Iraq into the wider war against terrorism required linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda and demonstrating that he was both willing and capable to share WMD technology with terrorist organisations.\(^{200}\) The presence of intergroup conflict between the Bush Administration and the CIA led to the Administration to belittle the validity of the CIA’s assessments and the Defense Department establishing the *Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group* (PCTEG) to carry out its own means of investigation to rationalise the Administration’s case for war.\(^{201}\) According to Cheney’s Middle East advisor Richard Perle, the PCTEG ‘began to find links

\(^{198}\) Rubin, James P. p.59
\(^{199}\) Janis, Irving L. p.198
\(^{201}\) Badie, Dina. p.289
that nobody else had previously understood or recorded in a useful way’. 202 Gellman argues that the PCTEG began forming bits of ‘ignored information’ to create a picture of ‘an epic struggle between a whole category of nations and us [the U.S.]’. 203 As the Downing Street Memo – a British official’s account of a meeting in Washington in July 2002 - noted, ‘facts were being fixed around policy’ and not vice versa. 204 This resulted in a fundamental error in data-processing. John Prados argues that collective rationalisation resulted in the group ‘taking a hypothesis (Saddam and al-Qaeda were allied) and seeing if the data fit, rather than taking the data and adding it up to form their own conclusions’. 205 Furthermore, President Bush and other members of the Administration dismissed UN reports and U.S. intelligence analysis doubting the WMD claim. 206

Nevertheless, despite PCTEG’s findings, the CIA could find little evidence connecting Saddam Hussein with al-Qaeda, claiming that the two were ‘far from being natural partners’ with ‘each trying to exploit the other for their own benefit’. 207 The Administration’s handling and filtering of information illustrates the Bush Administration’s efforts at collective rationalisation. 208 They avoided structured adversarial debate, where supporters and critics of invasion would have been able to present their opposing views. 209 Tension with the CIA made the Administration more insulated and cohesive, resulting in official intelligence analysis not

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203 Gellman, Barton. p.224
208 Badie, Dina. p.291
209 Pressman, Jeremy. p.172
being relied on, even in the most significant national security decisions. The process of ‘connecting the dots’ resulted in inaccurate intelligence and an internalisation within the group about how Saddam Hussein and Iraq should be perceived.\textsuperscript{210} It can therefore be established that the groupthink symptom collective rationalisation was present within the Bush Administration, leading to defective decision-making such as selective bias in the face of factual information and decisions limited to few alternatives.

**Pressures toward Group Conformity:**

Janis presented conformity of a cohesive group as a major symptom of groupthink. Self-censorship results in each member’s inclination to ‘minimise to himself the importance of his doubts and counterarguments’ while the shared illusion of unanimity partly results from self-censorship, ‘augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent’.\textsuperscript{211} Pressure on dissenters involves ‘direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group’s stereotypes and illusions or commitments’, while self-appointed mindguards ‘suppress deviational points of view by putting social pressure on any member who begins to express a view that deviates from the dominant beliefs of the group’.\textsuperscript{212} As a result of group conformity, members collude to protect plans from ‘critical scrutiny by themselves and by any of the government experts’.\textsuperscript{213}

**Self-Censorship & Illusion of Unanimity**

Richard Clarke asserts that ‘the Administration began with Iraq on the agenda’.\textsuperscript{214} Clarke recalls the day following the terrorist attacks in New York, President Bush approached him

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  \item Badie, Dina. p.291
  \item Janis, Irving L. p.198
  \item Janis, Irving L. p.41
  \item Janis, Irving L. p.43
  \item Clarke, Richard A. p.264
\end{itemize}
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and asked, ‘see if Saddam did this – see if he’s linked in any way’. It can be argued that post 9/11 led members of the Bush Administration to unanimously accept the Bush Doctrine in two ways. Firstly, increased cohesiveness among the hawks elevated their desire for broad retaliation and thus their quest for other members of the Administration to accept this view. Secondly, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld’s promotional leadership ensured a lack of debate on the premise on broad retaliation, making military invasion the dominant strategy and discourse within the group. Presidential advisor Karl Rove helped sustain this dominant strategy by limiting the number of policy specialists in the White House who might have questioned the Administration’s policy, which further contributed to a lack of debate over American policy in Iraq. Thomas Ricks’ interview with a U.S. general who wished to remain anonymous presents a compelling claim regarding the implementation of invasion as the principal and dominant strategy. He stated that the people around the president ‘were making simplistic assumptions and refused to put them to the test’ and knew they ‘wouldn’t subject their hypothesis to examination’. Having placed – according to Clarke – Iraq as a priority as early as September 12, 2001, it can be argued that the agenda was set very early on and once the symptoms of groupthink such as group conformity took hold, it was increasingly hard for members to question or critically assess this assertion. This was due to the fear of hampering the group cohesiveness within the Administration. The illusion of unanimity thus involved little examination of alternative courses of action.

215 Clarke, Richard A. p.32
216 Badie, Dina. p.285
217 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
**Pressure on Dissenters**

Mann’s Vulcans worked to make it clear that dissent would not be tolerated. However, Powell and Tenet were notable examples of dissenters – at least initially – during the policy-making process leading up to Iraq. Powell’s gradual reversion back into the dominant view held by the Administration further advanced the viability of groupthink within the group. Badie asserts that while the Vulcans initially imposed the dominant view of broad retaliation, Powell remained sceptical.\[221\] When Wolfowitz publicly proclaimed that the U.S. would not limit its response to Afghanistan, Powell responded by stating ‘we’re after ending terrorism - ending terrorism is where I would leave it and let Mr. Wolfowitz speak for himself’.\[222\] Powell thus clearly posed a threat to the conformity of the group as a whole. However, the presence of pressures on dissenters and mindguards helped put a stop to any potential counter-option to be proposed by Powell. Gellman argues that Cheney attempted to convince individuals who questioned the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, which invariably led to less variety in debates.\[223\] President Bush also acted as a mindguard, personally requesting Powell to get back into line and ‘put on [his] war uniform’.\[224\] Ultimately, both Powell and Tenet experienced vertical pressures to conform. Powell who initially opposed regime change, preferring instead ‘smart sanctions’, shifted focus to securing allies once he had internalised policy, while Tenet felt pressure to secure ‘good intelligence’.\[225\] Tenet later rued not objecting over the direction the policy was taking, commenting that he ‘should not have let silence imply agreement’.\[226\]

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221 Badie, Dina. p.285  
222 Mann, James. p.302  
223 Gellman, Barton. p.227  
225 Badie, Dina. p.288  
226 Tenet, George. p.317
**Self-appointed Mindguards**

Mindguards also carried out censorship, stemming the flow of different forms of information within the Administration. The National Security Council (NSC) has traditionally provided a setting for all advisors to present their differing points of view to the president. However, Bob Woodward argues that Stephen Hadley did not believe that the NSC should involve contentious and divisive debate, believing instead that his task was to ascertain Bush’s wishes, and then act as a mindguard to bring Tenet and Powell into line.227 According to Woodward, Hadley believed that ‘consensus was not only possible in a quarrelsome world of national security policy, but necessary’.228 Former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill claims that Cheney and his allies – including Hadley – formed a ‘praetorian guard that encircled the president’, ensuring the limitation of opposing views.229 As a result, Paul Pillar argues that certain types of intelligence had an ‘easier time making it through the gauntlet of coordination and approval’.230

**The Question of Irrationality**

It is therefore evident from empirical observations that groupthink symptoms of group conformity were present and actively influenced the Bush Administration. Mindguards controlled the flow of information and helped put dissenters into line. The illusion of unanimity was preserved as silence was perceived as consent when in reality the silence was maintained as to not harm or jeopardise group cohesiveness. With many symptoms of groupthink now established to have been present within the Bush Administration during the

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230 Pillar, Paul. p.22
policy-formation leading up the invasion of Iraq, we can conclude from findings that they did have an influence on policy processes. We can therefore now ask ourselves whether actions within the decision-making were irrational. It is worth reminding ourselves about Janis’ argument that groupthink was likely to lead to ‘irrational and dehumanising actions directed against out-groups’. With all the data that has been amassed, research can now assess whether groupthink led to irrational actions - motivated failure of self-knowledge - within the Bush Administration.

Research concludes that groupthink to a large extent led to irrational actions within the Bush Administration. Self-censorship, mindguarding, pressures on dissenters and collective rationalisation led to a purposeful limitation of data on which to process cost-benefit calculations. Groupthink resulted in the marginalisation of one dominant view, leading defective processes and changing images, which in turn limited the scope on which to process a rational decision. The groupthink process made hesitant members internalise the perceived threat posed by Saddam Hussein, effectively blocking any room for opposing views. Illusion of unanimity consolidated this blockage of opposing views, even if – as has been presented – other members disagreed with the course that the overall policy was taking. The belief in the inherent morality of the group backed up the Administration’s view that they were morally right to pursue invasion against an ‘evil’ enemy which also contributed to irrational perceptions of the enemy and further distortion in the decision-making process. Ultimately, analysis can agree with Janis’ assertions and affirm that the presence of groupthink led to irrational actions during the policy processes which in turn led to the non-rational decision being taken to invade Iraq.

231 Janis, Irving L. p.13
232 Badie, Dina. p.294
233 Badie, Dina. p.278
Conclusion

The two main research questions asked whether the decision to invade Iraq was a rational decision and whether groupthink influenced policy processing. Research can conclude that the decision to invade was not a rational one since the Bush Administration did not maximise its goals through invasion and groupthink did influence policy processes within the Bush Administration leading up to war.

Research assessed whether the goals of the Administration were reached in order to ascertain the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq. Consequently, research analysed whether the goals of defeating terrorism, bringing democracy to the Middle East and halting the development and proliferation of Iraqi WMDs were reached in the years following the invasion. Research found that all three goals were not fulfilled. Instead of defeating terrorism, present-day Iraq has become a haven for Islamic fundamentalist organisations with ISIL commanding significant control in northern Iraq. At the time the research was being finalised, President Barack Obama stated that ‘ISIL is a direct outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion’.\textsuperscript{234} He went on to say that current events in Iraq are an ‘example of unintended consequences – which is why we should generally aim before we shoot.’\textsuperscript{235} His remarks back up the findings and conclusions that the Administration did not maximise its goal of defeating terrorism by invading Iraq. Furthermore, democracy has not been established in Iraq and has not spread throughout the Middle East as a result of invasion. Contradictory American policies favouring authoritarian regimes while simultaneously promoting democracy and al-Maliki’s misrule has not consolidated democracy. Furthermore, parts of Iraq are controlled by un-elected actors and not even under administrative control


\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
from Baghdad. Hence, invasion to achieve democracy was a non-rational decision. Finally, the decision to invade to halt WMD production and proliferation was also a non-rational decision since research finds that there was no active WMD programme to stop in the first place. A war to stop the development and proliferation of something that did not exist and hence was not found leads this project to conclude that the Administration failed in this goal as well.

Ultimately, the decision to invade Iraq was a non-rational decision. However, while the decision to invade Iraq was not a rational decision, research found that it was not an irrational decision but rather a failed prediction due to the Administration’s bounded rationality. Such findings allowed analysis to employ the groupthink model to delve deeper into the psychological group dynamics within the Bush Administration in order to assess if groupthink was present and caused irrationality within policy processes. Through the synthesis of Janis’ groupthink with broader socio-psychological studies, research uncovered the presence of groupthink symptoms within the Bush Administration that came to shape policy processes and affected the overall decision to invade Iraq. These symptoms included overestimations, closed mindedness and pressure towards conformity, limiting policy processes on which to process cost-benefit calculations. These groupthink symptoms were found to lead to symptoms of defective decision-making within the Bush Administration such as failing to prepare a contingency plan, selective bias in the face of factual information and limiting discussions to few alternatives. Through these findings, this project found that the Bush Administration purposefully limited data on which to process cost-benefit calculations. Through the parameters set, research can conclude that this was irrational and had a part to play in bounding the Bush Administration’s cost-benefit rationality during the process of deciding which course of action would maximise its goals in Iraq and the Middle East.
While investigating for the presence of groupthink, research managed to obtain accounts from various members within and close to the Bush Administration; it nevertheless does not contain a whole picture of what went on within the Administration between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. This must therefore be considered a weakness in the analysis. This project would have greatly benefitted from one-to-one interviews with members and affiliates of the Bush Administration with the aim of asking questions directed to the subject of rationality and groupthink. However, such a scenario was not possible. It must be acknowledged that in any research, a perfect account of events in any scenario is hard to obtain, let alone within a presidential administration. The research also recognises that the use of different conceptual lenses – such as a Marxist lens – would have perhaps yielded different findings. However, as stated in the introduction, this research wished to engage with concrete empirical statements and analyse them. Nevertheless, now that findings have yielded that the decision to invade Iraq was a non-rational decision and the Bush Administration acted irrationally within the policy process; this can perhaps theoretically supplement a future Marxist analysis into the Bush Administration’s decision to invade Iraq. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, there have been many doubts as to the legitimacy of the Administration’s rhetoric of invading Iraq in order to achieve its goal of spreading democracy in the Middle East. Chapter 1 tested the rationality of the decision to invade Iraq to achieve democracy and found the decision to be a non-rational one. Thus, these findings can help supplement future studies questioning the legitimacy of the democracy rationale.
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