

Realism, Security, and Democracy: A 'Sophisticated' Realist Critique of the War on Terrorism¹

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On Tuesday, our country was attacked with deliberate and massive cruelty. We have seen the images of fire and ashes, and bent steel. George W. Bush, September 14, 2001

We build a world of justice, or we will live in a world of coercion. The magnitude of our shared responsibilities makes our disagreements look so small. George W. Bush, Berlin, Germany, May 23, 2002

If, however, it is utopian to ignore the elements of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of morality in any world order. E. H. Carr²

Introduction

When George W. Bush made the above statements about our shared responsibilities, he simultaneously justified preemptive war and offered a vision of the future that starkly opposes the unbridled use of force enshrined in the idea of preemption. While the internal logic of this statement appears to be painfully flawed, it actually reflects the President's contradictory goals

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² E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1964 [1946]), 235.

of rooting out evil (a problematic but nonetheless idealistic goal) and maximizing his perception of American interests. Thus, we have recently witnessed a preemptive war against Iraq in the name of “national security.” Certainly, realist international relations theorists, statesmen, and politicians often rely on “national security” when they seek to justify particular policy decisions, and therefore the term itself ought to raise doubts regarding the legitimacy of “American” interests. In this light, the debates over the direction of the “war on terror” in the United States offer experts and laypeople a current political context within which to interrogate the claim that realism provides the most sober perspective on national security.

The true test of any claim to realist security is to demonstrate the implications of particular policy choices: namely, is the United States and the world safer today than it was in the wake of the events of 9/11? In order to answer this question, this paper argues that two dominant strains of realism currently compete for political and rhetorical control over the direction of the so-called “war on terrorism.” For heuristic purposes, I have referred to these two different strands as “official” and “sophisticated” realism. The paper discusses the main arguments for preemption made by the Bush administration and the responses from the mainstream political arena. The most visible manifestation of this debate appears in the form of the recent national security strategy signed by President Bush where justifications for preemptive war fall next to assertions regarding the United States’ advocacy of “those who resist nonviolently.” Depending upon who wins this struggle, the long-term resolution of this conflict will result in increased domestic and international security or insecurity. Official realism threatens to undermine the modern international system, governed by international law, in the name of increased security for the USA and the world community through its preemptive war doctrine. If what I refer to as sophisticated realism can prevent official realism’s takeover of the terms of the debate and regain its hegemonic discourse, then security may retain its more general meaning as regards to the greater good. If not, the United States may go down in history as the impetus for the destruction of the modern world system of states.

In order to understand the claims of realism, it will be helpful to discuss the work of two scholars who attempt to “save” realism from itself. Alan Gilbert and David Goldfisher have recently attempted to reexamine the past in order to discover the implications of various interpretations of “realist” and “neo-realist” international relations theory. Goldfisher and Gilbert argue similarly that realism has an ethical core that is often overlooked in a way that favors the particular interest of ruling elite. In such a context of historical and political amnesia, students of international relations may forget that canonical realist figures from Thucydides to Hans J. Morgenthau argue that corruption (lack of a concern for the common good) undermines the realist’s moral core (“defense of national *survival*, the life of each citizen—against aggression”³). Both Gilbert and Goldfisher tie their arguments to realism in part because it *represents* the status quo and simultaneously *is* the status quo; in other words, realist theorists often speak as representatives of a powerful elite, and realism as a theoretical tradition is the dominant force in the field of International Relations.

³ Alan Gilbert, *Must Global Politics Constrain Democracy? Great-Power Realism, Democratic Peace, and Democratic Internationalism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 10.

In this paper, I argue that the Bush administration represents an “official” realism that particularizes the national interest as seen by a few elites.⁴ Thus, official realism offers a narrow construction of both “interest” and “security.” The “nation” reduces to something defensible by guns and bombs alone. As noted above, sophisticated realism views security in terms of the public good as opposed to the particular interests a few elite power holders. Sophisticated realism combines insights by “historical” realists (e.g. those who date back to a time earlier than the positivist revolution and others who have continued to conceive of a realist normative framework) and those who might be considered “neo” realists (popularized by the writing of Kenneth Waltz⁵ who strips International Relations down to a science; the term “neo-realism” is increasingly contested within the field).⁶ From a practical standpoint, this paper argues for the adoption of a moral or sophisticated realism because it will more directly impact world affairs than the heterodox positions of Post-Marxism, Post-structuralism, or Feminist theory.⁷

Theoretical Foundations of Realist Security

Contrary to Stephen D. Krasner’s interpretation that “realism is a theory about *international politics*,” John J. Mearsheimer recently argued, “the CENTRAL purpose of American power is to provide security for the United States in a dangerous world.”⁸ In other words, realism is more than simply one “tool” among many carried in the theorist’s “toolbox.” It has normative foundations and practical implications and thus becomes more than the sterile policy of a Washington “wonk” or the simple structural constraints of a “theory of international politics.” And, even if “realism” exists in some isolated realm without interference from other variables, it eventually must come down from its ivory perch to deal with the messy world of politics among and within nations. The heights of international politics might intoxicate power elites into forgetting realism’s moral purpose, but at its core, realism ought to maintain its professed sobriety with regards to the way things are and maintain security. One concern of this more reality-driven realism is security. Working under this view of a more nuanced realism, Goldfischer and Gilbert both employ the method of imminent critique to ask if realism in international relations is living up to its historical claims regarding the security of citizens. Each author pushes against the positivist boundaries and parsimonious theories of Waltzian international relations in order to provide a richer, more resonant conception of “realist security.”

⁴ I am indebted to Professor John Higley for his lucid account of the Bush elite, see John Higley, “Force to the Fore: The Bush Elite and America’s Post-9/11 Democracy,” paper presented to the 30th Joint Sessions of Workshops, European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), Edinburgh, UK, March 28-April 2, 2003.

⁵ On Waltz see, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man the State and War: a theoretical analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press); and Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁶ See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷ This is not to denigrate the importance of these traditions or their ability to critique the dominant forces in US foreign policy. However, these voices are systematically ignored by policy makers and only marginally tolerated by most realist scholars. See the excellent work by Michael Hardt and Antonia Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 [1992]); Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸ Stephen D. Krasner, “Realism, Imperialism, and Democracy: A Response to Gilbert,” *Political Theory* 20.1 (February 1992), 38; John J. Mearsheimer, “Hearts and Minds” *National Interest* (Fall 2002), 13, emphasis in original.

In this fashion, Gilbert demonstrates that “realists typically commend policies that, on their conception, will save lives and stop aggression: serve a genuine common good.”⁹ Similarly, Goldfischer argues that economic security must be reintroduced into realist analysis and included within the rubric of “security” in order to prevent major international crisis and *insecurity*. He does this by discussing the ways in which capitalist elites have controlled international politics and influenced international security.¹⁰ Following the work of Goldfischer and Gilbert, one can easily locate two additional overarching strains of realism: First, there exists what Goldfischer, following Carr, refers to as the “historical realist” and what Gilbert describes as the “sophisticated realist”: that is, those who delve beyond the vulgarities of pure power politics and elite control of states to tether realism to its normative foundations. Second, there exists what might be referred to as the “popular realist” or someone who serves elite interests. The first kind of realist tends to get condemned by the established leadership for “speaking truth to power,” while the second is embodied in the claim of the oft quoted generals in the Melian dialogues of Thucydides’ *History*: “in human disputation justice is then only agreed on when the necessity is equal; whereas they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get.”¹¹ This second type of realist, I argue, leads to insecurity whereas the first at least has the potential to lead in the direction of security.

As Gilbert writes, it might be surprising to those who read the so-called canon of international relations theory that a moral core of realism exists. Students of international relations read Thucydides and Hobbes and know two things: First, the strong take what they can and the weak grant what they must; Second, life is solitary, nasty, brutish, and short—humans are by nature self-centered and egoistic. Gilbert’s analysis debunks these now entrenched misperceptions, and thus distills a coherent moral core of realism(s) that pursues the public good: states must protect their citizens from harm.¹²

Similarly critical, Goldfischer draws upon the most modern of the classic texts in international relations theory: E. H. Carr’s *Twenty Years Crisis*. For Goldfischer, this text reveals a veritable goldmine in IR theory because the vast majority of IR scholars have under-read this text to the point of purposeful *misunderstanding*.¹³ Thus, when most students read the *Crisis*, they discover only that Carr criticized liberal internationalism and its adherents’ insistence upon “free trade—an imaginary condition which has never existed.”¹⁴ In this vein, Carr’s idealist theory, following Karl Marx’s dicta that philosophy changes the world, is usually dismissed, in favor of his more vulgar observation, that liberal internationalism, or the so called “consumer peace” hypothesis, does not bear fruit. Modern theorists of international relations and

⁹ Ibid. 8.

¹⁰ See David Goldfischer, “Prospects for a New World Order,” Draft, Paper for Conference on Globalization and Security, Ankara, (June 15-16, 2002), 1. Goldfischer draws on Carr’s emphasis that power alone is insufficient for stability in world affairs. The intention on both theorists’ part is to make a distinction between power as the illegitimate use of force and power in the Arendtian form of collective action. (See, Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1970 [1969]).

¹¹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War: The Complete Hobbes Translation*, ed. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 365.

¹² See in particular, Gilbert, Ch. 4 “Democratic Imperialism and Internal Corruption” where Gilbert systematically debunks the reigning views of the roots of realism: 148-180.

¹³ Ibid. Goldfischer.

¹⁴ Ibid. Carr, 7.

security studies, if they even read him, thus reduce Carr to a blunt object with which to beat liberals.¹⁵

Through the lens of post 9/11 and the war on terror, theorists and statesmen alike have begun to rethink and rephrase their respective theories of politics among nations. What kind of security exists in a world governed by nation states, where “states balance” or “bandwagon,” where “self-help” is the de facto rule of law, and where containment and deterrence serve to prevent war? How does the introduction of stateless actors like Osama bin Laden influence such a world? One might plausibly argue that, in the state-centric model, people feel extremely safe. Unfortunately the second example shatters the narrow view of security in the first. Significantly, the Bush administration is currently struggling with this question. The two strains of realism presented in this analysis have surfaced most publicly in the arguments of Retired Marine General Anthony Zinni and George W. Bush, with Zinni articulating the sophisticated realist position and Bush embodying the popular/official realist position. These competing positions amount to a debate between world order and world empire. One side advocates the rule of law and the pursuit of justice, while the other pushes for the rule of the strong.

Official Realism

Although George W. Bush may not sound like any form of realist typically associated with academic realism, he does seem to consider himself a realist. In a recent speech in South Dakota, he remarked that Congress needed more realists in its ranks:

It's important to have people in the Senate who are clear-eyed realists. It's important to have people who see the world the way it is, not the way we hope it is. And the world is a dangerous place, particularly with people like Saddam Hussein in power.¹⁶

By referring to Bush as an official realist, I hope to make a distinction between the behavior of realists and the theoretical foundations upon which they claim to base their policies. The battle lines between the official and the sophisticated realists are both moral and practical as noted by the second epigraph to this article: “We build a world of justice, or we will live in a world of coercion.” However, the subtleties of each side must not get lost amidst the campaigns to win the hearts and minds of the world community. Thus, in order to make the most convincing argument in favor of a sophisticated realist position, I will first make the best argument in favor of official realism. Lest I am accused of misrepresenting official realism or constructing a straw argument, I will employ large portions of Bush’s speeches that argue for war with Iraq, justify the extension of American presence outside its official boundaries, and call for “preemptive” war.

¹⁵ See Robert Jackson and George Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4: “the most comprehensive and penetrating critique of liberal idealism was that of E. H. Carr....IR is far more about conflict than about cooperation.”

¹⁶ George W. Bush, “Iraq Must Disarm Says President in South Dakota Speech,” <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/20021105-1.html>> (11/15/2002).

George Bush and Official Realism

The mainstream political arena physically exists largely as a one-way street from the television and into the hearts and minds of America's viewing audience.¹⁷ However, one might still idealistically recall our democratic right to assemble freely and publicly. Embodying this right, a right for which terrorists purportedly hate Americans, is the political stump and the crowds of agitated citizens that surround it. Recently, U.S. President George W. Bush argued this position at a rally in Cincinnati. In skilled debater fashion, Bush brought over to his side the dominant criticisms of a potential war with Iraq and addressed them openly. In his speech, he sought to persuade his audience both real and virtual that he had heard the criticisms and, after thoughtful consideration, was able to answer each claim. Thus according to Bush:

Many Americans have raised legitimate questions: about the nature of the threat; about the urgency of action -- why be concerned now; about the link between Iraq developing weapons of terror, and the wider war on terror. These are all issues we've discussed broadly and fully within my administration. And tonight, I want to share those discussions with you.¹⁸

Importantly, the president prefaced his speech by announcing that he wanted to “discuss a grave threat to peace, and America's determination to lead the world in confronting that threat.” Thus he set the stage; the constraints of the debate (then as now) centered on the threats to peace, the identity of those threats, and the methods to be used in order to stave off these threats. It would also be safe to say that his speech was an attempt to *promote* peace. Thus, attempting to promote peace, Bush addressed three criticisms: 1) What is the threat? 2) Why should we act now? And, 3) what is the link between the war on terror and Iraq? Although one might argue that more criticisms have been leveled against the Bush administration, these criticisms are serious enough.¹⁹

Bush answers the first criticism by arguing that Iraq “gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place.” He states clearly:

Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant who has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people. This same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East, has invaded and brutally occupied a small neighbor, has struck other nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States.

By its past and present actions, by its technological capabilities, by the merciless nature of its regime, Iraq is unique.

The nature of the threat seems clear. Saddam invaded and waged a war against Iran, he has weapons of mass destruction and has demonstrated his willingness to use them on his own people, and, in 1990 he invaded and “brutally occupied” Kuwait in a second attempt to dominate

¹⁷ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

¹⁸ George W. Bush, “President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat, Remarks by the President on Iraq” Cincinnati Museum Center - Cincinnati Union Terminal Cincinnati, Ohio (October 7, 2002), <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>> (10/26/2002). All subsequent quotations are from this speech unless otherwise specified.

¹⁹ See David Corn, “Impaired Intelligence,” *Nation* (September 5, 2002) <<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20020923&s=corn>> (May 2, 2003).

the entire Middle East. Additionally he hates the United States. Iraq stands alone in these regards according to the Bush administration.

The second criticism leveled against official realism, the question of “why act now?,” offers a stiffer challenge but Bush forcefully responds by claiming that since we know he has weapons of mass destruction and we know that he will use them, we must assume that he will use them, and therefore it would be better to deal with him now than at some future date when we can assume that he will be even stronger. Thus, Bush states that:

Some ask how urgent this danger is to America and the world. The danger is already significant, and it only grows worse with time. If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today -- and we do -- does it make any sense for the world to wait to confront him as he grows even stronger and develops even more dangerous weapons?

Now, at this point several critics will likely point out that Bush lacks proof.²⁰ On the contrary:

In 1995, after several years of deceit by the Iraqi regime, the head of Iraq's military industries defected. It was then that the regime was forced to admit that it had produced more than 30,000 liters of anthrax and other deadly biological agents. The inspectors, however, concluded that Iraq had likely produced two to four times that amount. This is a massive stockpile of biological weapons that has never been accounted for, and capable of killing millions.

President Bush answers the final question, “what are the linkages between Iraq and the war on terror?,” with a list of threats posed by Hussein. The response includes two parts. The first deals with Saddam’s weapons capabilities, which include chemical and biological weapons, in addition to “manned and unmanned” aerial vehicles, as well as medium range missiles that could reach “Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and other nations -- in a region where more than 135,000 American civilians and service members live and work.” And, although Bush does not explicitly say it, the implications are clear: Saddam might kill those people, which would be a crime against humanity.

The second aspect of his response to the final question deals with Saddam’s relationship with actual terrorists. Thus, Bush informs his audience of the following:

Over the years, Iraq has provided safe haven to...[terrorists]. And we know that Iraq is continuing to finance terror and gives assistance to groups that use terrorism to undermine Middle East peace. We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy -- the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September the 11th, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America.

The official realist argument, as depicted by President Bush, amounts to an indictment of Hussein as a danger to his people, to the Middle East, to the United States, and to the world. The UN Security Council’s willingness to sign an inspections document that authorizes the full use of

²⁰ See Eric Alterman, “Bush Lies, Media Swallows,” *Nation* (November 25, 2002) <<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20021125&s=alterman>> (May 2, 2003); and Dana Milbank, “For Bush, Facts are Malleable,” *Washington Post* (October 22, 2002), A1.

U.S. force matters very little because the U.S. and England will go it alone. In the end, Bush asks that his people support him in his mission to rid the world of evil, starting with Hussein.

Bush's above argument is deceptively inclusive because it incorporates both moral and practical reasons for war, a tactic which creates an imperative to invade Iraq: if we do not stop Saddam's evil plans, he will kill innocent Iraqis who do not support his dictatorial rule. Thus, to undertake military action would be a service to the people of Iraq, and thus not only make Americans safer, but make Arabs safer too.²¹

Finally, there remains the ever-present horror of September 11th that transformed the world. America's borders were safe, protected by friendly neighbors and two vast oceans. Unfortunately, the era of globalization has truly and profoundly constructed a small world after all. September 11th immortalizes our insecurity while it simultaneously forces Americans to rise to the challenge of their insecurity. As Bush states in the conclusion to his speech:

The attacks of September the 11th showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger. Before that tragic date, we had only hints of al Qaeda's plans and designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose outlines are far more clearly defined, and whose consequences could be far more deadly. Saddam Hussein's actions have put us on notice, and there is no refuge from our responsibilities.

We did not ask for this present challenge, but we accept it. Like other generations of Americans, we will meet the responsibility of defending human liberty against violence and aggression. By our resolve, we will give strength to others. By our courage, we will give hope to others. And by our actions, we will secure the peace, and lead the world to a better day.

Through this discussion of George Bush's speech advocating war against Iraq, this essay has demonstrated the moral claims made by official realism. This insight gives credence to a faith in democratic politics within the context of domestic America. In other words, although Bush and the official realists may want to wage unilateral war, they remain, at least instrumentally, tied to a language of morality; they must convince Americans that war against Iraq would be just. One caveat, as Gilbert argues, citizens will not fight a war unless they are persuaded by the moral arguments made in favor of war. Humans do not fight wars simply because of the dictates of those in power: "Thus, Soviet resistance to Nazism, Vietnamese to French colonialism, or American and Indian to British colonialism conflict with conventional neorealist notions of 'power' and require a well-stated, moral conception of a common interest to explain their surprising *counterpower*."²² Thus, we have to wait to see whether Americans have been persuaded by Bush's call to arms.²³ Yet, even if they are persuaded by official realism, we might still have recourse to critique through sophisticated realism. It is unclear that in the light of U.S. and British polling statistics that indicate support for war with Iraq *ex post facto* that they were ever convinced that war with Iraq would be or was just. More likely, it is a case of "rally round the flag" (regarding the polls during the war) and deference to success (with regards to the

²¹ See NPR, "Profile: One Iraqi Woman's Opinion of Potential War," Ann Garrels reporting, (November 1, 2002); See also, Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Stones of Baghdad," *New York Times* October 4, 2002, A27.

²² Gilbert, 1999, 44.

²³ See Patrick E. Tyler, "Annan Presses Bush to Avoid a Rush to War," *New York Times* (November 14, 2002), A1. Annan argues that Bush has been pressured by poll after poll that shows that most Americans, while in favor of a war with Iraq, want to do it within the structure of the UN.

short war). Neither of these examples speak to the extent to which Americans were “persuaded” by Bush’s moral rhetoric.

Sophisticated Realism

Following what Gilbert calls the sophisticated realist line of argument, the contradictions contained within Bush’s speech and his outline for war, not to mention his justification for “preemptive war,” are legion. The sophisticated realist critique of official realism juxtaposes a conception of the common good to the particular interests of the ruling elite (in this case, the Bush administration). It also demonstrates that the Bush elite has not escaped, at least in speech, the moral core of sophisticated realism. Thus, it argues that we might be able to make the world safer by following the foundational tenets of securing the common good. For example, in his October 7, 2002 speech in Cincinnati, Bush outlined both his response to critics of a war against Iraq and posited a moral argument that resonates with American exceptionalism and self-righteous self-conceptions. America has always stood up for what is right and against evil. American history is a history of struggle and triumph from the Mayflower, Manifest Destiny, the Civil War, the Cold War, and now World Terror. However, such claims serve to deflect rather than to help us reflect. The original claim made by Bush in his speech was that a war against Iraq would bring peace and security to both Americans and Arabs. Such comments fly in the face of sophisticated realism.

In his paper on “prospects for a new world order,” David Goldfischer argues that this most recent challenge to what he refers to as the “capitalist security community” or “CSC” may also result in the undoing of capitalism and its support structures in the various capitalistic regimes. Goldfischer sees this moment as a turning point in history that is perhaps as great as, or even greater than, the end of the Cold War. According to Goldfischer, there is a major challenge under way, which could potentially overturn the CSC. In the past, Goldfischer argues, there have always been two major viewpoints represented within the CSC. Although no real entity known as the CSC exists, the concept serves well to describe the forces at play since capitalism’s rise to power, which Goldfischer conveniently dates with the publication of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. In spite of its artificial status, the forces at work throughout this history appear most notably during crisis points. Goldfischer notes 5 major flash points that permit sightings or highlights of the CSC: 1) Gaining control over the state; 2) Warding off the working class challenge; 3) The threat of fascism and nationalism; 4) Transforming the Soviet Union; 5) Defeating socialist movements in the South; and the final, yet to be resolved challenge: defeating al Qaeda.²⁴

Each challenge influences or “overdetermines” capitalism in certain ways. However, each new incarnation of capitalism arises from the internal debates within the CSC over the appropriate response to its challengers. Following Goldfischer’s analysis, history would have looked differently had the more militaristic wing of the CSC won out over the more pacifist wing.²⁵ We can imagine a world where the militaristic wing decided to crush the workers instead of compromising on issues of working conditions and wages. Alternatively, we can imagine a world where nuclear war occurred instead of an ideological battle. Regardless of

²⁴ Goldfischer, 2002, 6.

²⁵ Goldfischer refers to these wings simply as “hawks” and “doves.”

one's view regarding the current crisis, it remains to be seen in which direction the world turns. As Goldfischer notes, all the world's nations are lined up behind the United States with only minor disputes.²⁶ How history unfolds will largely be up to the battle for control over the responses to 9/11. However, he is hopeful: "Put another way, the CSC has been willing to dilute its capitalism with overtures that smack of a 'progressive' perspective on domestic and international politics."²⁷ As previously noted, Goldfischer argues that the CSC, in each of his five cases, has answered the challenge to its authority by easing its exploitative grip. Based upon this history, Goldfischer seems hopeful that something similar may occur. However, he is aware that the Bush administration seems to be a poor candidate for "progressive" overtures.

Goldfischer's claims bear out in the current climate over the war on terror and the specific policy of the Bush administration. I have shown how Bush's arguments carry a moralistic overtone that appeals to many Americans' desire to be on the side of justice. However, following Goldfischer's materialistic interpretation, one might just as easily peel back the thin veneer of moralism and reveal the additional rationale regarding control of resources. As Dale Copeland has argued, nations often strike out aggressively when their access to resources appears to be limited. According to Copeland, Cold War era realists are correct in their argument that high levels of economic interdependence, and the threat of severed trade, increase the likelihood of war, "if only to ensure continued access to necessary materials and goods."²⁸ However, Copeland adds the caveat that a nation's expectations of *future* trade influence its decision to go to war over resources. Although it is outside the scope of this article to fully answer the question, "who benefits economically from a war with Iraq?," it may prove useful to understand this special relationship between resources and war in the oil producing countries.²⁹ Unfortunately, Copeland's logic stops short of explaining the current crisis since it would appear that, following 9/11, Saddam Hussein was even more ready to trade with the United States, and thus the U.S. should have thought that it had unlimited access to Iraqi oil.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have both been loosely referred to as "attacks on America." Although some Americans may identify themselves with the state, most Americans are not ultra-nationalists or fascists. Identification with the state was something that Hitler and Mussolini incorporated into their interpretations of fascism. I do not want to dismiss this feeling too quickly. Yet it seems incongruous with radical individualism (an identifiable American trait) that many Americans would find their self-consciousness reflected in either the twin towers of the World Trade Center or the extremely out-of-reach offices of the Pentagon. It seems more likely that the response sent a shiver down the hypothetical spine of the CSC. Even in the days leading up to 9/11, the CSC operated according to the precept "not of the right of the stronger, but of those in possession." As Carr acerbically notes, "Like all utopias

²⁶ Ibid. 2; See also, Condoleeza Rice, "America has the Muscle" *Daily Telegraph* (October 17, 2002), 26. Here Rice makes the same point as Goldfischer but adds that realists and idealists have merged in the post 9/11 Bush administration.

²⁷ Ibid. 10.

²⁸ Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security* (Spring 1996), 6.

²⁹ See Neela Banerjee, "Threats And Responses: Petroleum; Stable World Oil Prices Are Likely To Become A War Casualty, Experts Say," *New York Times*, (October 2, 2002), 13. A brief review of the major world presses reveals that, at the outset, a war with Iraq will cause a rise in the price of oil. At the time of this writing, the price of oil is US \$31 per barrel. For an attempt to debunk the economic argument, see David Frum, "Myth II: America wants war with Saddam because of oil," *Daily Telegraph (London)*, (October 22, 2002), 25.

which are institutionalized, this utopia became the tool of vested interests and was perverted into a bulwark of the *status quo*.”³⁰ One might ask, are the World Trade Center and the Pentagon truly representative institutions of American democracy or even American “values?” Perhaps something else is at work.

An even more nuanced interpretation of American power might explain the course of the war better than Copeland’s “Theory of Trade Expectations.” By this I mean that Copeland’s materialistic analysis might benefit from the work of scholars of empire. In a surprisingly uncontroversial piece of critical analysis, *Blowback*, Chalmers Johnson writes:

Even though the United States at century’s end appears to have the necessary firepower and economic resources to neutralize all challengers, I believe our very hubris ensures our undoing. A classic mistake of empire managers is to come to believe that there is nowhere within their domain—in our case, nowhere on earth—in which their presence is not crucial. Sooner or later, it becomes psychologically impossible not to insist on involvement everywhere, which is, of course, a definition of imperial overextension.³¹

Following Johnson’s argument, it might be plausible to argue that the war against Iraq is another facet of the ever increasing and complex extension of American empire. However, the further down this road we travel, the more one might also argue that we simultaneously move further away from the moral imperatives addressed above regarding the protection of American lives. The passage from Johnson’s book bears too striking a resemblance to the current crisis to simply pass it off as the ravings of some 1960s throwback. After all, Johnson refers to his previous incarnation prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall as a “spear-carrier for empire.”³² More recently, G. John Ikenberry and David C. Hendrickson have independently argued that the new grand strategy reflects imperial designs.³³ Certainly the comments above regarding the might of American military, not to mention the idea that “managers of empire” believe that they are needed everywhere, sounds frighteningly close to the words that George Bush uses. Recall the passage quoted above where Bush tells his Cincinnati crowd “by our actions, we will secure the peace, and lead the world to a better day.”

The materialist argument runs into interesting and confusing territory when it attempts to deal with the idea of hegemony versus domination.³⁴ The CSC might accurately represent an international community of sorts. Certainly during the Cold War there was evidence to substantiate the claim. However, even then the argument seems to rule out the interests of capitalists within communist societies. Their interests are hardly represented—that is unless one makes the argument that the “West” was fighting for their interests by fighting communism. However, the current crisis seems to pit nationalists (read: imperialists) against internationalists.

³⁰ Both quotations are from Carr, 1964, 225.

³¹ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, LLC, 2000), 221.

³² Ibid. “Prologue: A Spear-Carrier for Empire,” ix-xix.

³³ See G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs* 81.5 (September-October 2002): 44-60; and David C. Hendrickson, “Toward Universal Empire: The Dangerous Quest for Absolute Security,” *World Policy Journal* (Fall 2002): pdf version 1-10. For a popular version, see Jonathan Schell in *Harpers* in March & April 2003.

³⁴ My understanding of the term “hegemony” is informed primarily by Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches To World Order*, ch. 7 “Gramsci, hegemony, and international relations: an essay in method (1983),” 124-141, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

If the argument that the U.S. is becoming imperial in its designs carries weight, then the answer to the new threat to the CSC might not come from a debate between doves and hawks, as Goldfischer argues, but between imperialists and anti-imperialists. Some merit to this argument accrues from a comment made by John J. Mearsheimer at the one-year anniversary of 9/11 when he argued that “Instead of building an empire—which will increase anti-American hatred and put U.S. forces on the front lines around the world—the United States should seek to reduce its military footprint and use force sparingly.”³⁵ Since Mearsheimer hardly represents a dovish position, it appears that al Qaeda has even managed to align hawks and doves (against the imperialists).

Such an alternative view might go a long way to explain why sophisticated realists will continue to point out to the administration, the American public, and anyone who will listen, that at the very least, the approach to the war on terror may result in further catastrophe. Far from “dovish,” former commander of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, not to mention a Bush administration envoy to the Middle East, Retired Marine General Anthony Zinni argues that if and when the U.S. ousts Saddam Hussein from Iraq, the real problems will only then begin: “There are 98 opposition groups the last time I counted. As a matter of fact, I think it’s increased a little bit. If you believe they’re all going to rush to the palace, hold hands and sing ‘Kum Ba Ya,’ I doubt it.”³⁶

Perhaps even more surprising than Zinni’s comments, Deputy CIA Director John McLaughlin released a letter to the *New York Times* indicating that war with Iraq might actually increase the likelihood of another attack on the United States. According to the *Times* report on the McLaughlin letter:

The letter said “Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks” with conventional or chemical or biological weapons against the United States.

“Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist action,” it continued. It noted that Mr. Hussein could use either conventional terrorism or a weapon of mass destruction as “his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him.”³⁷

In spite of the fact that Iraqi soldiers did not use chemical or biological weapons, the description here is not of a madman poised to unleash an arsenal of death for sadistic reasons.³⁸ Rather, the CIA report describes what any person or nation would do under immanent threat: self-defense. In fact, it reveals Bush’s policy of “preemptive” war as cover for preventive war. According to Hendrickson, “Preemptive war is when force is used only when it is apparent that the enemy is on the verge of striking...Preventive war is the first use of force to avert a more remote though still ostensibly formidable danger...Ergo, we must strike to avert the threatened

³⁵ Mearsheimer, 2002, 15.

³⁶ Anthony Zinni, “Bush administration’s plans for Iraq in a post-Saddam Hussein era,” NPR Morning Edition (October 11, 2002); Perhaps proving Zinni’s point, the *New York Times* reported that there is a power vacuum in Iraq due to the single-minded pursuit of the war, Dexter Filkins and Ian Fisher, “U.S. Is Now in Battle for Peace After Winning the War in Iraq,” *New York Times Web Edition* (May 3, 2003).

³⁷ Alison Mitchell and Carl Hulse, “C.I.A. Sees Terror After Iraq Action,” *New York Times* (October 9, 2002), A1.

³⁸ Further, in the wake of Bush’s pseudo declaration of victory in Iraq, the US’s failure to find “weapons of mass destruction” provides a different set of problems, the least of which is the lie betrayed by such a lack of evidence.

calamity, and sooner rather than later.”³⁹ It must be noted that the CIA did not mean for this “evidence” to be used to contradict the president’s stance against Iraq in spite of the fact that it clearly reveals that Iraq is not “on the verge of striking.” CIA Director George J. Tenet’s attempts to rant and rave this point home to those who will listen sounds too much like hot air to be convincing. Tenet insists that Saddam Hussein would like to use weapons of mass destruction as blackmail devices:

Mr. Tenet said tonight that "there is no inconsistency" between the C.I.A. views in the letter and those of the president. He emphasized the Iraqi leader's use of such weapons against his own citizens. Senior administration officials insisted that the letter did not contradict President Bush's assertions on the imminent threat posed by Mr. Hussein. They pointed to another section of the letter that noted that the likelihood of Mr. Hussein's using weapons of mass destruction "for blackmail, deterrence, or otherwise, grows as his arsenal builds."⁴⁰

However, weapons of mass destruction were *designed* in large part to be used for blackmail and deterrence. Deterrence is simply the threat of force. Blackmail, one might argue, serves a more sinister purpose. Hussein could, after all, threaten to blow up one of our allies. Yet, such an action on the part of Hussein has only brought justified and forceful wrath upon his head. It goes almost without saying that he ought to be condemned regularly, and at length, for crimes against humanity committed against his own citizens. Yet, I find within Tenet’s comments no hint of “imminent threat” and only the blustering of a White House toady.⁴¹

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The conclusion of the debate between the official and the sophisticated realist interpretation of security will, like Minerva’s Owl, appear only at dusk. At the time of this writing many activists both within the administration and the legislative branch, not to mention the tireless foot soldiers in the MoveOn organization who have been organizing in key House and Senate races around the country, have been agitating and arguing for a more nuanced interpretation of security.⁴² This paper has argued that there exist at least two mainstream positions within the status quo of the American political complex. I believe that, forced to make a choice between the two camps, the sophisticated realist line of reasoning may more directly result in security for Americans and the world. However, such a victory, if won, must not result in complacency or a defense of isolationism.

Globalization, in the form of rapid information transfer and porous borders, combined with America’s imperial maneuvers, will likely result in continued “blowback” like the events of September 11. Scholars and journalists, like Michael Walzer and Christopher Hitchens, who lambaste even the slightest attempt to understand why the terrorists did what they did, only serve

³⁹ Hendrickson, 2002, 7 of 10.

⁴⁰ Op cit.

⁴¹ In Tenet’s defense, he may have just been covering his rear. After all, Tenet was appointed by Clinton the Democrat and he could very well have let his letter out in an underhanded attempt to hamstring the Bush administration’s push for war.

⁴² For information on MoveOn, visit their web site at: <http://www.moveon.org>.

to increase the likelihood that another September 11 will occur.⁴³ A more nuanced view of the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics will go a long way towards understanding the world in which we live.

For those who truly want to “remember” 9/11 and to honor the victims, I draw their attention to the comments of Mary Dejevsky. She notes wryly that the president spent the previous nine months leading up to September 11, 2002, *failing* to act in a presidential manner:

Even before yesterday's cataclysmic events, Mr. Bush's White House was already revising the President's programme for the autumn in an effort to make him more "presidential". A plan to concentrate on "values" and education was scrapped in response to concerns of senior Republicans that Mr. Bush had not yet established his authority.⁴⁴

One notes the paternalistic tone of the senior Republicans. According to those who now rally around the president, Bush needed something to “make a man” out of him. Similarly, Dejevsky notes that the Oklahoma City bombing actually “made” Bill Clinton into a President (read: man). This discussion of the war on terrorism’s (hidden) preoccupation with manliness creates a space for further critique of the war on terrorism. Even more important for the current discussion, however, is the simple fact that Bush was not a popular president before September 11, 2001. Although the war may have made him into a president, very little has changed regarding the issues that made him unpopular.⁴⁵

In my search for solutions and policy recommendations, I am drawn to the very document that justifies the policy of the official realists. On September 20, 2002, George W. Bush published a new national security strategy. Although the highlight seems to be its justification for pre-emptive war, it also includes an almost poetic amalgamation of neo-liberal economic ideology, liberal-democratic assertions, and what I can only think of as truly cosmopolitan policy recommendations. Thus, I will conclude by recommending that the United States actually follow the more cosmopolitan aspects of its new and somewhat enlightened national security strategy. The ideological and discursive battle between the internationalists and the imperialists (or the sophisticated and the official realists) actually plays out within the pages of President Bush’s truly amazing national security strategy document.

Practical policy solutions for a new world order include the following direct quotations from Bush’s national security strategy:

- 1) The United States will deliver greater development assistance through the New Millennium Challenge Account to nations that govern justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom. We will also continue to lead the world in efforts to reduce the terrible toll of AIDS and other infectious diseases.⁴⁶

⁴³ For these views, read any articles by these two authors. They can be found in *The Nation* immediately following September 11, 2001 (until Hitchens quit the editorial staff of that magazine) and in the hallowed pages of *Dissent* magazine.

⁴⁴ Mary Dejevsky, “Terror In America: American Reaction - Bush Faces Biggest Us Crisis Since Vietnam,” *The Independent* (September 12, 2001), 8.

⁴⁵ See David Corn, “Back to Iraq: Bush and his Pro War Bias,” *Nation* (November 12, 2002) <<http://www.thenation.com/capitalgames/index.mhtml?bid=3&pid=152>> (11/15/2002).

⁴⁶ George W. Bush, “National Security Strategy,” *New York Times* (September 20, 2002), 3.

- 2) The United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States, and NATO as well as other long-standing alliances. Coalitions of the willing can augment these permanent institutions. In all cases, international obligations are to be taken seriously. They are not to be undertaken symbolically to rally support for an ideal without furthering its attainment.⁴⁷
- 3) Champion Aspirations for Human Dignity.⁴⁸
- 4) Use our foreign aid to promote freedom and support those who struggle non-violently for it, ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded for the steps they take.⁴⁹
- 5) We will also wage a war of ideas to win the battle against international terrorism. This includes:
 - using the full influence of the United States, and working closely with allies and friends, to make clear that all acts of terrorism are illegitimate so that terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide: behavior that no respectable government can condone or support and all must oppose;
 - supporting moderate and modern government, especially in the Muslim world, to ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation;
 - diminishing the underlying conditions that spawn terrorism by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on areas most at risk; and
 - using effective public diplomacy to promote the free flow of information and ideas to kindle the hopes and aspirations of freedom of those in societies ruled by the sponsors of global terrorism.⁵⁰

Much remains unfinished in the debate over control of the direction of the war on terror. I do not want to give the impression that I support pre-emptive war -- I do not. However, as with most politics, timing is crucial. Further, much of the content of the national security strategy reflects a sensitive reading of the times. The nuances of the strategy reflect the debate that still remains unresolved within the administration and within the American psyche. As Carr observes, however, one must always caution against the construction of justificatory morality, "power goes far to create the morality convenient to itself, and coercion is a fruitful source of consent."⁵¹ Thus, it would be unwise to recommend Bush's strategy in its entirety. By taking the best aspects of it, those aspects that reflect recognition of human dignity and respect the rights of all human beings, it seems plausible that the United States might actually become a leader in the fight for increased international security in an expanded form. Carr's realism offers a caveat towards such a potentially new international order. "A new international order and a new international harmony can be built up only on the basis of an ascendancy which is generally accepted as tolerant and unoppressive or, at any rate, as preferable to any practicable alternative. *To create these conditions is the moral task of the ascendant Power or Powers.*"⁵² Following

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 7.

⁵¹ Carr, 236.

⁵² Ibid. Emphasis mine.

such a nuanced realism, one that recognizes Gilbert's insistence on the value of the common good, political elites and heuristic entities like the CSC will offer "progressive" options only when they face challenges from below. Thus, we have seen the Bush elite's use of moral language throughout its successful push for war. Citizens and members of the world community must push their leaders to create the conditions to which Carr refers. The consumer or the democratic peace hypothesis may be a utopia, but the push towards something like it may in fact reduce human suffering. Realist security versus realist insecurity, and the debates between official and sophisticated realists, are debates that all concerned members of the world community ought to pay close attention to in the coming days, months, and years ahead.

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