# Twenty Years Post-Iraq: Neoconservatism from the Ethereal into the Room

**Rifqy Tenribali Eshanasir**
*The Australian National University*

## ABSTRACT

*Over twenty years after the controversial 2003 Iraq War, there has been several academic foreign policy analyses into what factors influenced United States (US) President, George Bush, and his administration's decision to invade Iraq. Investigations into influential factors behind critical decisions made on behalf of the state like this can be called 'Foreign Policy Analysis' and is done to understand and potentially predict similar decisions in the future. Regarding the 2003 Iraq Invasion, different Scholars emphasise domestic-level factors, including US bureaucratic politics, media and public opinions, the interests of US neoconservatives or national culture and identity. Additionally, some scholars emphasise international-level factors, namely the importance of oil for the US and the influences of the global balance of power. This article argues a combination of neoconservative interest groups, US bureaucratic politics, and small-group dynamics especially influenced President Bush's invasion decision. Specifically, neoconservative interest groups navigated US bureaucratic politics to gain high governmental positions and influenced small-group dynamics, limiting President Bush's perception of alternatives and ultimately deciding to invade Iraq. The article proposes an explanatory narrative for the Iraq War, exploring neoconservatism's journey as an intangible idea, to being institutionalised, and making its way into President Bush's inner circle through certain individuals.*

***Keywords:*** *Bureaucratic Politics, Foreign Policy Analysis, Interest Groups, Iraq War, Small-Group Dynamics.*

*Lebih dari dua puluh tahun setelah Perang Irak yang kontroversial pada tahun 2003, terdapat beberapa analisis mengenai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keputusan Presiden Amerika Serikat (AS), George Bush, dan pemerintahannya untuk menginvasi Irak. Para ahli menekankan pentingnya faktor-faktor di tingkat dalam negeri (domestik), termasuk politik birokrasi AS, media dan opini publik, kepentingan kaum neokonservatif AS, maupun budaya dan identitas nasional negara tersebut. Beberapa ahli juga menekankan faktor-faktor di tingkat internasional, misalnya pentingnya minyak bagi AS dan pengaruh keseimbangan kekuatan global. Artikel ini berargumentasi bahwa kombinasi kelompok kepentingan neokonservatif, politik birokrasi AS, dan dinamika kelompok kecil berperan penting dalam mendorong Keputusan Presiden Bush untuk menginvasi Irak. Secara khusus, kelompok kepentingan neokonservatif memanfaatkan politik birokrasi AS demi mendapatkan posisi yang tinggi dalam pemerintahan dan mempengaruhi dinamika kelompok kecil yang kemudian membatasi persepsi Presiden Bush dari alternatif lain dan mendorongnya memutuskan untuk menyerang Irak. Artikel ini menawarkan narasi penjelas mengenai Perang Irak yang mengeksplorasi perjalanan neokonservatisme dari sebuah ide yang tidak berwujud, menuju ide yang terlembagakan, dan kemudian masuk ke lingkaran dalam Presiden Bush melalui individu-individu tertentu.*

***Kata-kata Kunci:*** *Politik Birokrasi, Analisis Kebijakan Luar Negeri, Kelompok Kepentingan, Perang Irak, Dinamika Kelompok Kecil.*

*Twenty Years Post-Iraq: Neoconservatism*
*from the Ethereal into the Room*

It has been twenty years since the United States (US) invaded Iraq in 'the Second Persian Gulf War', when the US invaded and then occupied Iraq under the pretenses of its "continued possession and manufacture of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and its support for terrorist groups" from 2003 until 2011 (Britannica 2023). The invasion has become one of the most controversial wars for several reasons including erroneous accusations of Iraq's WMDs and support to Al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the 2001 9/11 attacks. Additional reasons are the mishandling of the Iraq occupation which fell into lawlessness, sectarian violence and prolonged conflict. This has resulted in several foreign policy analyses into factors influencing President Bush Jr. and his administration's decisions-making. The point of these analyses is to identify and isolate factors that led to making such a drastic foreign policy decision for future reflection. "Probing into the decisions by which others set their course" is natural, for "statesmen and scholars are forever engaged" (Wolfers 1962, 37). An iconic instance of foreign policy analysis is the numerous investigations into decision-making behind the 1962 US 'Cuban Missile Crisis' (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). Thus, a foreign policy analysis of the 2003 Iraq Invasion is important, for an interrogation may reveal the truths of how such a decision can be understood, manipulated, and even perhaps predicted.

Regarding the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, some Scholars highlight the influence of individual-level factors. These include Bush's cognitive biases, leadership personality, and the small groups he consulted (Houghton 2008; Renshon 2005; Badie 2010). Other scholars give importance to domestic-level factors, including US bureaucratic politics, media and public opinions, the interests of US neoconservatives or national culture and identity (Smith 2008; Foyle 2004; Khong 2012; McCartney 2004). Additionally, some scholars emphasize international-level factors, namely the US' importance of oil and influence from the global balance of power (Klare 2003; Miller 2010). This article acknowledges that all these factors were influential to some degree. However, this article argues that that neoconservative interest groups particularly navigated US bureaucratic politics to gain high governmental positions and influenced small-group dynamics, limiting Bush's perception of alternatives and ultimately deciding to invade Iraq.

The article proposes the narrative of neoconservatism's journey as an intangible idea, to being institutionalized, and making its way into Bush's inner circle through certain individuals. Hence, the article comprises three sections, asserting the influence of: 1) interest groups, 2) bureaucratic politics and 3) small-group dynamics on the Iraq invasion.

## Interest Groups: Neoconservatism in the Ethereal

Beginning the narrative of neoconservatism journeying from an abstract idea to influencing Bush's inner circles when deciding to invade Iraq, the article argues and analyzes the influence of neoconservative *interest groups*. Interest groups are "an organized association which engages in activity relative to government decisions" (Dietrich 1999, 280). Several individuals focused on specific issues, such as human rights activists, unions, or businesses. While Dietrich excludes sub-organizations within government, he acknowledges that groups within government can act with shared interests.

Interest groups can influence the early stages of US foreign policy decision-making, Interest groups frame debates, supervise foreign policy implementation, and provide policy analyses and information (Dietrich 1999, 293) to the leading state decision-maker like a think tank. Dietrich is supported by Mearsheimer and Walt (2006, 7) who support that "policymakers will tend to accommodate those (interest groups) who care about the issue, even if their numbers are small, confident that the rest of the population will not penalize them for doing so." However, interest groups do face limitations, since executive branches can still make decisions independent of interest groups and because foreign policy remains constrained by a country's position in an international system (Dietrich 1999, 284).

This section argues neoconservatives constitute an interest group and that their presence around Bush regarding invading Iraq was influential. The key Figures in the 2003 Iraq-invasion decision can be traced to US neoconservative interest groups before they entered the 2001 Bush administration, either being neoconservatives

themselves or individuals aligned with them without personally subscribing to neoconservatism. Among President Bush's trusted advisors on Iraq were several members associated with the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a neoconservative think tank established in 1997 that promotes American global leadership, military strength, and moral principles (PNAC 2013). The PNAC represents a neoconservative interest group and were influential to the outcome of the 2003 Iraq Invasion for two reasons: their principles regarding US foreign policy towards non-democratic states, and its members, several of whom promoted Iraq-intervention before joining the Bush Jr. administration.

The PNAC Statement of Principles advocates several points in line with US intervention in states like Iraq during the 1990s and 2000s. These include aspirations to increase US defense spending to maintain 'military supremacy' and promote American principles abroad. Military supremacy and perceived moral superiority of American principles will later be demonstrated to align with neoconservative tenets. This think-tank would even later write a joint letter to the previous US President Clinton, criticizing his administration's Iraq-containment strategies as "steadily eroding" and recommending *direct* military intervention to remove Iraq leader Saddam Hussein (PNAC 1997 & 1998).

Among the 2001 Bush Jr. administration, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy State Secretary Richard Armitage, and Defence Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle were publicly PNAC members or signed PNAC documents, among others. With so many key Bush administration members being neoconservatives or their allies, their values are of significant importance.

Neoconservatives' values, especially regarding US national interests abroad and how to pursue them, follow certain tenets which highly align with the PNAC. First is a strong belief in the moral superiority of democracy and its essentiality to US diplomacy, believing the US is morally responsible for changing tyrannical non-democratic regimes. Next is the importance of US supreme military hegemony which should be leveraged when spreading democracy within countries with tyrannical governments. These two tenets alone

perfectly align with the PNAC Statement of Principles mentioned above. Furthermore, the last neoconservative tenet is that international institutions only obstruct the US from pursuing its goals which benefit the international community (Schmidt and Williams 2008, 193-201; Khong 2012, 313-315). Thus, the PNAC and its members' positions on US foreign policy make this think tank rather representative of a neoconservative interest group. Neoconservative ideals will be demonstrated to have been permeated the post-9/11 Bush Doctrine advocating for preemptive direct military action for regime change.

Analyzing the language of President Bush's speeches between 2002-2003 indicates alignment with neoconservatives' importance on US military supremacy so the rest of the world can enjoy peace without participating in arms races. This is illustrated by statements like, "America has, and intends to keep, military strength beyond challenge... limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace," and, "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States" (Bush 2002a; 2002b). Moreover, statements like, "but... that freedom can be the future of every nation" (Bush 2003), also align with the neoconservative focus of spreading democracy as the morally superior form of governance. On moral superiority, Bush is supported by Vice President Cheney who said, regarding expectations of the US reception by Iraqis, "I really do believe that we will be greeted as liberators... they (the Iraqis) want to the get rid of Saddam Hussein and they will welcome as liberators the United States when we come to do that" (Houghton 2008, 176).

Infamously, the 2003 Iraq invasion commenced without approval from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), aligning with neoconservatives' disregard for international organizations. While the UNSC passed resolutions to send inspectors to Iraq to check the cease of WMDs manufacturing and other countries supported extending inspections, "seeking no further UN resolutions and deeming further diplomatic efforts by the Security Council futile, Bush declared an end to diplomacy and issued an ultimatum to Saddam, giving the Iraqi president 48 hours to leave Iraq" ("Iraq War" 2003, 2). This ultimatum and rejection of international institutions' efforts is resonating with neoconservativism. The

dismissal of international institutions, which could undermine the invasion's public support, is also in line with Mearsheimer and Walt's (2006, 7) conceptualization that Bush as the executive lead of policy trusted his advisors, a neoconservative interest group, rather than the wider public.

Therefore, this article places importance on the influence of neoconservative interest groups. While it admits that Bush's own leadership personality may simply align with neoconservatism, the presence of several known neoconservatives around him only eases the president's narratives and actions leading to the Iraq invasion. However, it is not a sufficient explanation as interest groups can face bureaucratic constraints in shaping foreign policy. The actual positions of neoconservatives and their organizations within government must also be considered.

## Bureaucratic Politics: The Institutionalization of Neoconservatism

While neoconservative interests are prevalent in the Bush Doctrine, neoconservative could not have as easily influenced the invasion without aggressively advocating it within a bureaucracy that had already to some extent institutionalized Iraq intervention. This section argues that prior US bureaucratic politics complemented interest groups by cementing Iraq regime change as a US national interest, easing neoconservatives to assume influential institutional positions to better advocate invasion since before the 2001 Bush Jr. administration. The 'bureaucratic politics' model is a decision-making framework wherein individuals and groups within government along with their interactions influence foreign policy. It developed from a combination of conceptualizations. The model combines the influence of institutional memory and routines created by previous decision makers' decisions (Organizational Process), political bargaining between government individuals or groups (Governmental Politics), and pulling and hauling between individuals with different interests in foreign policy (Allison 1969, 698-707; Halperin et al. 2006, 361-363).

Together, these concepts form the bureaucratic politics model, where "government leaders have competitive, not homogeneous interests; priorities and perceptions are shaped by *positions,*" and, "the management of piecemeal streams of decisions is more important than steady state choices" (Allison and Halperin 1972, 44). Groups within governments have separate interests – including increasing influence and resources, furthering their mission and maintaining relevance – that can contend with each other (Day 2023). While the article acknowledges bureaucratic politics criticisms, such as its disregard for government officials' agency and absolution of politicians' failures (Krasner 1972, 160-166), it still places importance on how government subgroups vie for influence in foreign policy decision-making. This aspect was demonstrated in Iraq by debates between the US Defense and State Departments and the lack of mediation by the National Security Council (NSC).

The journey for neoconservatives to institutionalize direct military regime change in Iraq predates Bush Jr.'s presidency and the 9/11 attacks. Evidence of the Iraq-related aspirations of neoconservatives who later joined the Bush Jr. administration include their contributions to the first Gulf War in 1990-1991. Under President George H. W. Bush (Sr.), future Vice President Dick Cheney appointed Secretary of Defence and later orchestrated *Operation Desert Shield*, the US military buildup in Saudi Arabia in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This was then followed up by the US aerial offensive on Iraq, Operation Desert Storm. This operation was partially led by Paul Wolfowitz, who was appointed Undersecretary of Defence by Bush Sr and became "no. 3 in the Pentagon hierarchy" in 1991 (Smith 2008, 94). Recall that Wolfowitz would become Bush Jr.'s Deputy Defence Secretary. These figures and more would further illustrate their desire for Iraq regime change.

Still, during Bush Sr.'s administration, the 1991 Gulf War campaign ceased without overthrowing Saddam's regime. Executive and legislative governments' frustrations resulted in bipartisan sentiment to Iraq regime change as as a US foreign policy objective. The is united front behind Iraq's regime change gave it 'bureaucratic momentum' to settle within the government's institutional memory (Smith 2008, 95).

During President Bill Clinton's administration, an opposing the Republican Congress pressured it to not disrupt the Iraq regime change's momentum. Consequently, Clinton's first term saw the NSC support rebel groups to challenge Saddam, failing spectacularly due to lacking multiple advocacies to produce more comprehensive government action. This is coined the "marketplace of ideas" (Kaufmann 2004, 5-48) and is important to Bush Jr.'s invasion later. Displeased with the Clinton's 'soft stance' on Iraq, several neoconservatives of the future Bush Jr. administration showed their character through the PNAC. Future members of the Bush Jr. administration Richard Armitage, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld signed a letter to President Clinton under the PNAC militarily removed Saddam in January 1998. In October 1998, Clinton's government signed the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA), which allowed indirect intervention in Iraq, specifically the training and provision of military equipment to Iraq rebels. Thus, neoconservatives in favor another offensive on Iraq had evidently been mobilizing since before Bush Jr.'s presidency.

Finally, entering the 2001 Bush Jr. administration, ten out of eighteen of the PNAC Clinton Letter's signatories assumed high positions in government (Moens 2004, 163). High military figures during the first Gulf War, neoconservatives and allies within and without the PNAC Became US Vice-President, high officials in Defence and State Departments, and other influential security-related positions. Thus, a security-oriented coalition predisposed to direct military intervention in Iraq formed across the US bureaucracy. Assuming powerful bureaucratic positions with indirect military intervention already institutionalized, neoconservatives awaited an opportune time and political environment.

The 9/11 attacks provided these neoconservatives with the ideal crisis environment to aggressively propose direct US military intervention in Iraq into the agenda (Smith 2008). Here, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz as the Defense Department's number 1 and 2 became aggressive Saddam-removal lobbyists with support from VP Cheney. Rumsfeld "prevailed at committee meetings in pushing this option because he is a good bargainer who understands the channels of power and *lobbies* for his department and position effectively" (Yetiv 2011, 239). Yetiv also recounted the

Defence Department's draft to invade Iraq with its introduction titled "Looking at Iraq through the lens of 9/11," indicating the neoconservatives' utilization of the post-crisis situation. Meanwhile Wolfowitz "emerged as 'the intellectual godfather' of the regime change lobby within the administration" (Smith 2008, 99).

Neoconservatives still had to debate direct military intervention in Iraq, mainly against the State Department. Yet, the post-9/11 atmosphere and partisan political environment resulted in the debates lacking multiple advocacies for Bush to gain comprehensive perspectives. Accounts of debates between Cheney and Rumsfeld (both PNAC signatories) against State Secretary Powel indicate a lack of mediation from the NSC and its Advisor, Condoleeza Rice (Woodward 2006, 241). Despite facilitating multiple advocacies on US security being the NSC's responsibility, Rice was inexperienced, which resulted in a dysfunctional NSC that only occasionally led the debates between veteran interlocutors (Crotty 2003, 456; The Economist 2007, 56)John F. Kennedy and George W. Bush, in relation to unanticipated international crises. One, President Kennedy, employed a broad body of expert opinion and entertained a wide range of options in meeting the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963. The actions taken avoided a potential worldwide nuclear war. The other, George W. Bush, consulted only a few, like-minded colleagues and appears to have decided early on that a war directed against Iraq and Saddam Hussein was a necessity. The administration's justifications for the war were difficult to prove and the administration chose an essentially bilateral (as against a multi-lateral. Ultimately, the Rumsfeld-Cheney coalition was "far more effective than (Secretary of State Colin) Powell in using the bureaucracy to limit the options considered" (Yetiv 2011, 240). Bush's information on the situation was overwhelmed by neoconservatives. Ultimately, he delegated US foreign affairs to Cheney and Rumsfeld, who would be "most responsible for 'preparing the ground' for the president's eventual decision to invade Iraq" (Smith 2008, 101).

At this point, neoconservative interests to invade Iraq have transformed from an intangible idea held by few into an institutionalized form of government routines and influential US bureaucrats. However, President Bush is still an individual

who consulted small groups of advisors than more abstract organizations. Neoconservative interests and its institutionalization in US bureaucracy are insufficient explanations if people could not influence the president and that inner circle.

## Small-Group Dynamics:
## Neoconservatism Reaches into the Room

After neoconservatism was institutionalized in US governance, the article argues neoconservative individuals influenced the Iraq invasion through *small-group dynamics*. That is, the idea that interactions and relationships between the central decision-maker and the individuals they consult can influence the outcome of choices including foreign policy. In the case of the 2003 Iraq invasion, the essay asserts that VP Cheney, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and their subordinates contributed to symptoms of *groupthink*, an element of small-group dynamics. Neoconservatives would limit President Bush's perception of alternative options to ultimately select direct intervention.

Small-group dynamics like groupthink have been previously observed in famous international crises involving US foreign policy, namely the 'Cuban Missile Crisis' (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). In October 1962, US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) deliberated a national response towards the Soviet Union's placement of missiles in Cuba with the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExCom), an exclusive group of associates and government officials. JFK was under pressure to select between a blockade or a military air strike, among other possible options, by various blocs of ExCom members. Similar with the 2003 Iraq invasion, a bloc of National Security, Intelligence, and army chiefs pressed JFK to select a hard-military approach in an airstrike (Allison 1971, 193-198). Yet, JFK refrained from such a decision in the end.

Allison emphasized the partial but crucial role of another influential within ExCom on JFK's eventual choice of a Cuban blockade. This included JFK's younger brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Defence Secretary McNamara, and Presidential Special Counsel

who together strongly contested the previous group who favored an airstrike (Allison 1971; 200-210). JFK's own relations with his security and military chiefs following the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion also had an inverse effect on the appeals for an airstrike. Ultimately, the particular composition of ExCom prevented a pro-airstrike bloc of individuals from overwhelming the discourse and limiting the perceived available options to President Kennedy. Now, the small-group dynamics during the Cuban Missile Crisis can serve as a point of comparison to the 2003 Iraq Invasion.

The essay asserts that unlike in 1962, '*groupthink*' was rampant within Bush Jr.'s inner circle. This led to unanimity within his advisors and weighted his decision-making to favor invasion. Janis defines groupthink as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis 1972, 9). Groupthink is more likely to occur under certain conditions, the prime condition being the degree of *cohesiveness* or like-mindedness among members. This condition is complemented by how insulated the group is and how insistent its leader is when promoting solutions.

Cohesion was prevalent in multiple forms among Bush's advisors regarding Iraq. Most visibly was its predominant military composition, demonstrated by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, his Deputy Wolfowitz, and Defence Policy Board Chairman Perle, along with organizations they would eventually establish like the Office of Special Plans (OSP). These figures were already PNAC-signatory neoconservatives, demonstrating an overlapping cohesion of people in favor of direct Iraq regime change before 9/11. Moreover, consensus on Iraq regime change as US national interest already grew beyond the PNAC into the US government and the president himself, demonstrated by the ILA signing and Bush's speeches mentioned in previous sections. Of course, there remained skeptics to invading Iraq, specifically Secretary of State Colin Powell and CIA Director George Tenet (Badie 2010, 284). However, they were a minority and would become the main targets for neoconservatives to convert or pressure. Thus, this group's composition and dynamics is almost the inverse of the 1962 ExCom.

Next, the groupthink model has scholars to consider factors that affect a group's ability to consider more or less options in foreign policy decision-making. These include: 1) how the members of a group interact, 2) its level of *openness* and, 3) the role of its central leader. For instance, a more closed group with a strong leader may consider fewer courses of action and become dominated by certain individuals (Garrison 2003, 177-183). Additionally, stressful situations can contribute to groupthink by inducing group cohesion (t'Hart 1990, 124) while also making members seek strong leadership. t'Hart also places importance on "horizontal influence" or pressure from peers, "vertical influence" or pressure from superiors, and intergroup conflict intensifying cohesion (t'Hart 1990, 49&105). Furthermore, Janis proposed several observable symptoms of groupthink.

Among the symptoms above, the ones most visible within Bush's inner circle were an "illusion of invulnerability" among its members resulting in optimistic risk-seeking behavior, the pressuring of dissenting members, the presence of "mindguards" who filter information that contradicts the group's outlook, and collective rationalization preventing the group from re-evaluating assumptions when challenged by contradicting information (Janis 1972, 197-198). These symptoms along with closedness, stress, and pressures align with accounts of Bush's inner circle.

Evidence of the above symptoms, namely pressuring dissenting members to convert to the majority, include how neoconservatives in Bush Jr.'s circle used the post-9/11 stressful crisis environment to more easily advocates direct military intervention. Then, while Bush promoted his Bush neoconservatives such as Cheney and Rumsfeld demonstrated strong leadership in the group and made debates less open and narrower, predominantly leaning towards wide military retribution and fewer alternatives (Badie 2010, 285), as conceptualized by Garrison. Moreover, they used their positions to apply pressures among their peers including Powell and Tenet, who refrained from invasion. Their pressure on President Bush especially drove State Secretary Powell to conform towards invasion despite still having personal reservations, contributing to an illusion that the group entirely supported the Bush Doctrine (Badie 2010, 284-286).

Cheney and Rumsfeld also censored, or mind guarded the group against information contradictory to their *collective rationalizations*. Internally, neoconservatives and especially Cheney created a "praetorian guard" surrounding Bush denying him diverse views and "honest, disinterested perspectives about what's real" (Suskind 2004, 293). Often whenever Powell expected to meet Bush Jr. alone to advocate non-invasion options, Cheney would also be present. Powell suspected Cheney of discrediting him as "not on the team" after talks with Bush (Woodward 2006, 226). Externally, the US the Department of Defense also insulated the group by becoming its headquarters from hearing the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) independent findings. When the CIA had deemed there was insufficient or contradictory evidence of any Al-Qaeda-Saddam connections, the Defence Department established the OSP which sought biased intelligence and already suspected Iraq's involvement in 9/11 (Badie 2010, 289). In all, the Mostly politicized information that Bush's group was exposed to only helped justify preconceived rationalizations to invade Iraq.

In summary, unlike JFK's ExCom during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bush Jr.'s in-group comprised largely of likeminded neoconservative figures who already agreed on invading Iraq. In this cohesive environment, neoconservatives upheld the illusion of unanimity by pressuring remaining dissenting peers to conform and even filtering information accessible to the president to more easily justify invasion. Neoconservatives were supported by post-9/11 stress, easing them to make wide military intervention a dominant option within debates. The article reiterates how small group dynamics, while the most observed factor, could not have had as much influence without pre-existing neoconservative interests and prior bureaucratic politics maintaining Iraq regime change within institutional routine.

## Conclusion

While this article acknowledges the influence of other factors on levels of foreign policy analysis, such as the influence of 9/11 on the US decision to invade Iraq, it finds that neoconservative interest groups, bureaucratic politics, and small-group dynamics were

essential. Neoconservatism and its adoption by a group of eventual Bush Jr. administration members were necessary because of the principles that make Iraq a suitable case for the US to demonstrate its 'just military might' in spreading democracy. However, it alone was insufficient if previous bureaucratic politics did not keep Iraq regime change 'on the table' while its proponents worked towards assuming governmental positions that made advocating direct military intervention easier. Still, high government positions and bureaucratic politics were also insufficient if individuals like Cheney and Rumsfeld manipulated the perceived unanimity and information available to Bush and his inner circle. Among the countless factors, without neoconservative ideas, the institutional memory of Iraq regime change spanning a decade prior, and individuals explicitly blocking opponents and intelligence against invasion from reaching Bush, the article concludes the US decision to invade Iraq in 2003 would have faced more obstacles.

## Acknowledgment

## About the Author

Rifqy Tenribali Eshanasir is a postgraduate student at the Australian National University, undergoing a Master of International Law and Diplomacy. Rifqy obtained his bachelor degree in Social Science (International Relations) at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in 2021. He can be contacted at Rifqy.Eshanasir@anu.edu.au.

# References

## Book and Book Chapters

Allison, Graham T., 1971. *Essence of Decision: Explainng the Cuban Missile Crises*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.

Allison, Graham T. and Phillip Zelikow, 1999. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd ed. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Halperin, Morton H., Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter., 2006. *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press.

Janis, Irving L., 1972. *Victims of Groupthink; a Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.

Khong, Yuen Foong, 2012. "Neoconservatism and the Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Operation Iraqi Freedom." In Smith, Steve, et al., 2012. *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moens, Alexander, 2004. *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy, and Loyalty*. 1st edition. Florence: Routledge.

Suskind, Ron, 2004. *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

T'Hart, Paul, 1990. *Groupthink in Government: A Study of Small Groups and Policy Failure*. Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Wolfers, Arnold, 1962. *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press

Woodward, Bob, 2006. *State of Denial*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Yetiv, Steven A., 2011. *Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-Making and the Persian Gulf War*. 2nd ed. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

## Journal and Online Journal

Allison, Graham T., 1969. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis", *The American Political Science Review*, **63**(3): 689–718.

Allison, Graham T., and Morton H. Halperin, 1972. "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications", *World Politics,* **24**(S1): 40–79.

Badie, Dina, 2010. "Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift toward Iraq", *Foreign Policy Analysis,* **6**(4): 277–96.

Crotty, William, 2003. "Presidential Policymaking in Crisis Situations: 9/11 and Its Aftermath", *Policy Studies Journal,* **31**(3): 456.

Dietrich, John W., 1999. "Interest Groups and Foreign Policy: Clinton and the China MFN Debates", *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* **29**(2): 280–96.

Foyle, Douglas C., 2004. "Leading the Public To War? The Influence of American Public Opinion on the Bush Administration's Decision to Go to War in Iraq", *International Journal of Public Opinion Research,* **16**(3): 269–94.

Garrison, Jean A., 2003. "Foreign Policymaking and Group Dynamics: Where We've Been and Where We're Going", *International Studies Review,* **5**(2): 177–83.

Houghton, David Patrick, 2008. "Invading and Occupying Iraq: Some Insights From Political Psychology", *Peace and Conflict,* **14**(2): 169–92.

Kaufmann, Chaim, 2004. "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War", *International Security,* **29**(1): 5–48.

Klare, Michael T., 2003. "For Oil and Empire? Rethinking War with Iraq", *Current History (1941),* **102**(662): 129–35.

Krasner, Stephen D., 1972. "Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)", *Foreign Policy.*

McCartney, Paul T., 2004. "American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War", *Political Science Quarterly,* **119**(3): 399–423.

Miller, Benjamin, 2010. "Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq" *Security Studies,* **19**(1): 26–65.

Renshon, Stanley A., 2005. "Presidential Address: George W. Bush's Cowboy Politics: An Inquiry", *Political Psychology,* **26**(4): 585–614.

Schmidt, Brian C., and Michael C. Williams, 2008. "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists", *Security Studies,* **17**(2): 191–220.

Smith, Martin A., 2008. "US Bureaucratic Politics and the Decision to Invade Iraq", *Contemporary Politics*, **14**(1): 91–105.

The Economist, 2007. "A Falling Star; Lexington", *The Economist (London),* **382**(8512): 56.

## Videos

Day, Benjamin, 2023. *Week 5 - Bureaucratic Politics*. INTR8068: *Foreign Policy Analysis*. [Video]. Lecture presented at the Australian National University, Canberra.

## Online Articles

Britannica, 2023. "Iraq War." *Encyclopedia Britannica* [Online]. In https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War [accessed on 15 May 2023].

Bush, George W., 2002a. "President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point." *The White House* [Online]. In https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html [accessed on 21 May 2023].

———, 2002b. ''IX. Transform America's National Security Institutions to Meet the Challenges and Opportunities of the

Twenty-First Century." *The National Security Strategy* [Online]. In https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives. gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss9.html [accessed on 28 August 2023].

———, 2003. "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East." *The White House* [Online]. *The White House* [Online]. In https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives. gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html [accessed on 06 November 2023].

Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt, 2006. "The Israel Lobby". *London Review of Books* [Online]. In https://www.lrb. co.uk/the-paper/v28/n06/john-mearsheimer/the-isra-el-lobby [accessed on 10 July 2023].

PNAC, 1997. "Statement of Principles". *Project fot the New Amercian Century* [Online]. In https://web.archive.org/ web/20050205041635/http://www.newamericancentu-ry.org/statementofprinciples.htm [accessed on 16 May 2023]

———. 1998. "Letter to President Clinton on Iraq". *Project fot the New Amercian Century* [Online]. In https://web.archive. org/web/20131021171040/http://www.newamericancen-tury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm [accessed on 01 May 2023].

———. 2013. "Welcome to the Project for the New American Century". *Project fot the New Amercian Century* [Online]. In https://web.archive.org/web/20130112203305/http:// www.newamericancentury.org/ [accessed on 20 May 2023].