Jack Snyder

Robert Y. Shapiro

Yaeli Bloch-Elkon

FREE HAND ABROAD, DIVIDE AND RULE AT HOME

Saltzman Working Paper No. 6

March 2008

Jack Snyder is Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science, Columbia University, and a member of the institute. He is the author of *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict; Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*; *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914*, , and co-author (with Edward J. Mansfield), of *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War,* winner of the Lepgold Prize for Best Book on International Relations, and the Foreward Book of the Year Gold Award in Political Science.

Robert Y. Shapiro, a professor of political science, specializes in American politics with research and teaching interests in public opinion, policymaking, political leadership, the mass media, and applications of statistical methods. Professor Shapiro has published numerous articles in major academic journals. He is a coauthor of *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* with Benjamin I. Page (University of Chicago 1992) and *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* with Lawrence R. Jacobs (University of Chicago 2000). His current research examines American national policymaking, political leadership, and opinion from 1960 to the present.

Yaeli Bloch-Elkon is a Senior Instructor/Assistant Professor of Political Science and Communications at Bar-Ilan University, where she received her Ph.D. Her research interests include political communication and the relationships between the mass media, public opinion and foreign policy. Bloch-Elkon's current research concerns public opinion, foreign policy, terrorism, and the mass media.

This paper was written for a project on unipolarity organized by Michael Mastanduno, John Ikenberry, and William Wohlforth. An earlier version was presented at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. We thank Michael Desch, James Gibson, Ronald Krebs, Benjamin Page and participants in a seminar at the LBJ School at the University of Texas for criticizing an earlier draft. Kaori Shoji provided able research assistance. Shapiro worked on this article while a 2006-7 Visiting Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation. Data were obtained from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (American National Election Study panel data); the responsibility for all analysis and interpretation is the authors'.

ABSTRACT

Under unipolarity, the immediate costs and risks of war are more likely to *seem* manageable for a militarily dominant power like the U.S. This does not necessarily make the use of force cheap or wise, but it means that the costs and risks of the use of force are comparatively indirect, long-term, and thus highly subject to interpretation. Unipolarity, combined with the opportunity created by September 11, opened a space for interpretation that tempted a highly ideological foreign policy cohort to seize on international terrorism as an issue to transform the balance of power in both the international system and American party politics. This cohort's response to the terrorist attack was grounded in ideological sincerity, but also in the routine practice of wedge issue politics, which had been honed on domestic issues during three decades of partisan ideological polarization and then extended into foreign policy.

Why did America invade Iraq? The glib answer is "because it could." In the unipolar moment, the immediate costs and risks of using military force against Saddam Hussein's hollow, troublesome regime seemed low to U.S. leaders.[1]

But this explanation begs important questions. Disproportionate power allows greater freedom of action, but it is consistent with a broad spectrum of policies, ranging from messianic attempts to impose a new world order to smug insulation from the world's quagmires. How this freedom is used depends on how threats and opportunities are interpreted through the prism of ideology and domestic politics.

The free hand in strategy is an enduring feature of American foreign policy. Unipolarity simply gave it unprecedented latitude. During the twentieth century, whether under multi-, bi- or unipolarity, America enjoyed the luxury of disproportionate power and geographical buffering, which allowed - even required - ideology to define America's strategically underdetermined world role. This ideology was normally liberalism, sometimes that of the disengaged "city on a hill," sometimes that of the crusading reformer.[2] Writing in the wake of the Vietnam War, Stephen Krasner worried that the more powerful the United States would become, the more this ideological leeway would express itself as imperialism: "Only states whose resources are very large, both absolutely and relatively, can engage in imperial policies, can attempt to impose their vision on other countries and the global system. And it is only here that ideology becomes a critical determinant of the objectives of foreign policy." [3] And yet when unipolarity arrived in the 1990s, skittishness about costs and casualties severely constrained American liberal idealism abroad.

This changed after September 11, 2001, not only because of the heightened fear of terrorism, but also because of the domestic political and ideological environment that made the most of it. Three factors--America's

[1] Robert Jervis, "The Compulsive Empire," *Foreign Policy* No. 137 (July/August 2003), 82-87.
[2] Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[3] Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 340.

unprecedented international power, the opportunity presented by the World Trade Center attack, and the increased polarization of the American party system--combined to permit the Bush Administration to reframe the assumptions behind American global strategy.

Since the late 1970s the American party system became increasingly polarized. Democrats became more uniformly liberal on a whole range of issues, and Republicans became uniformly conservative. While the overall proportion of moderate voters did not markedly decline, party politicians increasingly took ideologically divergent stances that forced voters to choose between starkly different platforms.[4] Republicans in particular developed an effective strategy of taking polarizing positions on non-economic "wedge issues" to mobilize their conservative base and at the same time raid voters from the Democrats' traditional middle and working class constituencies. Under President Ronald Reagan, the Republicans staked out divisive stances on social issues such as abortion, affirmative action for minorities, homosexuality, and religion, and also tried to consolidate ownership of the national security issue. Although the end of the Cold War initially blurred the ideological distinction between the parties in foreign affairs, a hard core of "neo-conservatives" worked to sharpen an ambitious, ideologically coherent program to exploit America's potential for global primacy. By the late 1990s, the Republicans' electoral payoff from domestic wedge issues was fading.[5] September 11 created an opportunity for preventive war on global terrorism, very broadly defined, to become the new wedge issue.[6]

We do not claim that the Bush Administration invaded Iraq *in order to* reap domestic political benefits. And whatever political benefits they *did* gain were short-lived due to the disappointing outcome of the invasion. Rather we argue that party polarization interacted with America's unipolar dominance and the

[4] Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2d ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006); Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Barbara Sinclair, *Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).
[5] Larry M. Bartels, "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter with Kansas*?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (2006), 218.
[6] Nicholas Lemann, "The Controller: Karl Rove Is Working to Get George Bush Reelected, but He Has Bigger Plans," *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2003.

shock of September 11 to create a situation in which preventive war seemed an attractive option to the Bush Administration, both internationally and domestically. The Republicans' long-term strategy of ideological polarization had fostered a confrontation-minded foreign policy cohort that was eager to seize this opportunity to use military power decisively to slash through knotty global problems. At the same time, the well-honed wedge issue strategy made divisive position-taking on Iraq seem like a plausible formula for partisan gain. As Colin Dueck puts it, "the idea of taking the 'war on terror' into Iraq offered something to Bush's conservative supporters, kept Democrats divided, and maintained the focus of debate on issues of national security where Republicans were strong."[7]

The U.S. since 1991 is the only case of a modern unipolar power. Our task is to place this unique case in a general conceptual framework, both to draw on general theory to explain it and to use the case to illuminate general propositions. To do this, we adopt several strategies of inference. First, we advance some logical arguments about the effect of domestic politics and ideology on the likelihood of discretionary war, such as the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, initiated by a great power under loose strategic constraints. Second, we examine the behavior of the United States in the twentieth century as a relatively unconstrained great power. Third, we theorize about the interaction of domestic regime type and the degree of international constraint in shaping strategic ideology. Whether the increased scope for ideology in the foreign policy of a strategically unconstrained state increases the likelihood of discretionary war depends on the regime type and the political incentives of the ruling coalition. Finally, we look at the theoretical literature on American party polarization, from which we derive more narrowly focused arguments about U.S. foreign policy under unipolarity. We do not argue that party polarization in a unipolar power necessarily leads to doctrines favoring discretionary war, but simply that party polarization made discretionary preventive war a tempting wedge issue given neo-conservative ideology and habitual Republican political tactics. We treat

[7] Colin Dueck, "Presidents, Domestic Politics, and Major Military Interventions," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 1, 2007, 17. Dueck argues that domestic political considerations were at most secondary in several U.S. interventions.

rising public threat perception following September 11 as a facilitating opportunity to exploit this as a wedge issue, not as a necessary precondition (and certainly not a sufficient one). The initial sections of the paper draw on a range of historical illustrations to probe the generality of our arguments. The remainder of the paper looks more closely at the foreign policy implications of polarized American wedge issue politics in the unipolar period.

How does unipolarity affect foreign policy ideas and choices?

A logical and venerable proposition holds that states are more likely to succumb to the lure of ideology in foreign policy when they are geopolitically unconstrained - that is, when they are very strong, unthreatened, or distant from trouble. A corollary proposition, advanced by Krasner, is that disproportionate strength is likely to increase the temptation of ideologically-driven expansionism and the use of force. The Bush preventive war doctrine and Iraq policy seem to confirm these predictions.[8] However, alternative consequences of unipolarity are also logically plausible and empirically supportable.

The absence of pressing material constraints may open the door to ideology in foreign policy for two reasons. First, it might allow the state to indulge its ideological preferences without fear of the consequences for its survival and wealth. Humanitarian intervention, for example, might be a luxury consumption item for states whose own security and prosperity are not in doubt. Similarly, Stephen Walt has argued that states choose allies based on ideological affinity only if the threats they face are relatively weak.[9]

Second, the national interest is always ambiguous, but this is especially so when material power is great and threats are indirect, distant, long-term, or diffuse. In this situation, circumstances do not force different observers to converge on a consensus view; ideology is indispensable as a roadmap to action and a tool of persuasion. As Dean Acheson said about overselling the Cold War

[8] Office of the President, National Security Strategy of the United States, September 2002, at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html.
[9] Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 33-40.

containment strategy at a peak of America's relative power, "we made our points clearer than the truth" to convince the mass public.[10]

Plausible as these arguments may be, the opposite case may be equally plausible. States that are under intense international pressure may be especially vulnerable to myth-ridden foreign policies. Hostile encirclements heighten the enemy images, bunker mentalities, and double standards in perception that are common in competitive relationships of all kinds, especially in international relations.[11] Nationalist and garrison-state ideologies are reinforced. Likewise, Charles Kupchan argues that declining empires typically adopt strategic ideologies of aggressive forward defense out of fear that their opponents will discover the truth about their growing weakness.[12] In contrast, diplomatic historians commonly applaud the pragmatism of powerful "off-shore balancers," whose privileged position grants them the freedom to be selective and fact-driven, waiting upon developments before committing troops. Whether powerful, unconstrained states are more ideological than weaker or highly constrained states depends greatly on their domestic politics, not simply their position in the international system.[13]

Krasner's corollary hypothesis - that powerful or unconstrained states are likely to succumb to an ideology of expansionism - is also an oversimplification. Powerful, secure states have the option to express their ideological values in the world through coercion, but they also have other options. They might choose to engage with the world pragmatically, taking what they need and ignoring the global problems that good fortune insulates them from. Or they might adopt a highly principled foreign policy that increases humanitarian assistance abroad, but eschews empire and declines to meddle in the internal politics of foreign

[10] Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), 374-5; see also Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol," *Political Science Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 1952), 481-502.
[11] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chapters 2, 3, 8, and 9.
[12] Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
[13] Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

peoples. Finally, they might be tempted by policies of limited liability, embarking on good works and moralistic hectoring abroad, but then heading for the exits when backlash makes costs rise.[14] Simply being powerful says little about whether or how ideology will express itself.

A further complication arises when the state is extraordinarily powerful but is threatened nonetheless - precisely the situation of the United States after September 11. Unipolar power grants uncommon freedom to act, and the high level of threat rules out strategies of indifference. As the Bush strategists argued, this situation required an assertive strategy of self-defense. One doesn't need to invoke any distinctive characteristics of the Bush Administration or its national security strategy to understand why the United States attacked Afghanistan to remove Al Qaeda training camps. But such necessary responses can sometimes be overgeneralized into an ideology that portrays the world as a place where ubiquitous threats must be countered by decisive, preventive action. Whether that framing prevails in policy debate will depend on the domestic political context, not just the international setting.

American power, variations in polarity, and strategic ideas

During the twentieth century, America's great power and geographical distance from threats affected its strategic ideas. However, variations in its relative power and in the polarity of the international system have not determined its strategic ideology in a simple or direct way. Instead, America's prevailing strategic mindset has been a product of the interaction of its international position and its domestic politics.

A recent study of American strategic culture in the twentieth century by Colin Dueck describes an enduring tension between the ideological commitment to remake the world in America's image and the countervailing urge to do it on the cheap. U.S. power and geographical isolation set up this tension but did not determine how it would be resolved. Dueck portrays an endemic contest among four schools of thought: assertive internationist liberals such as Woodrow

[14] Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 26-30.

Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy; "progressive" liberals such as Henry Wallace and George McGovern who seek to reform the world by example, not by intervention; nationalists such as Robert Taft and Jesse Helms who seek to limit international involvements and shun liberal rationales; and realists such as Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge who also set aside liberal ideals but are willing to use force to compete for dominance abroad. Dueck argues that the urge to limit liability abates under conditions of rising threat. In practice, this means that foreign threats play into the hand of assertive liberal internationalists, he says, because realism does not resonate with American political culture.[15]

However, Dueck also shows how party politics shapes outcomes in ways that cannot simply be read from international circumstances or even from the strategic preferences of the various schools of thought. An example is the demise of Wilson's plan for the U.S. to enter the League of Nations. As threats declined after the World War, Americans' ingrained inclination to limit liability undercut Wilson's proposed automatic commitment to collective security. Realist critics like Lodge wanted a policy based on flexible, bilateral agreements with the powerful European democracies, a sensible outcome that would have been consistent with America's liberal strategic culture. Dueck shows, however, that the realists' rhetorical battle against the League had the unintended consequence of bolstering the position of isolationist elements in the Republican party.[16]

Although the rise and decline of threats affected the fortunes of competing strategic ideas, this did not track directly with variations in polarity. As one might expect, ideas of limited liability (a form of free riding or "buckpassing") were prominent in the multipolar period. However, the U.S. ultimately balanced against rising great power threats under multipolarity in the two World Wars. The U.S. often limited its liability under unipolarity, too: the elder Bush's refusal to intervene in Bosnia, Republican attacks on Clinton's "mission creep" in the

[15] Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 31.
[16] Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders,* chapter 3.

Somali intervention, Clinton's turning a blind eye to the Rwanda genocide, Clinton's zero-casualty approach to resisting the expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo, and the younger Bush's 2000 campaign promise of a "humble foreign policy" that would eschew "nation building" abroad. Unipolar America's major military effort of the 1990s was the limited-aims war to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression in Kuwait, which threatened the world's oil supply. Carried out by a realist-packed Administration, the Gulf War was realist in motivation and strategy, not an ideological crusade. Even after September 11, the younger Bush declined to apply the principle of preventive war to the problem of North Korean nuclear proliferation on the practical grounds that the North Koreans could level the South Korean capital in retaliation against a preventive strike.

Conversely, U.S. Cold War strategy under the tight constraints of the bipolar nuclear stalemate was highly ideological, founded on the encompassing rationale of a struggle to the death of antithetical social systems. Military interventions anywhere and everywhere were justified by the sweeping claims of the domino theory, which held that small setbacks in geopolitical backwaters would exert a ripple effect undercutting commitments to central allies. The Cold War consensus was in part a reaction to the rising Communist threat, but it was also a result of the selling of Cold War ideology and the policy of global containment. This ideology was shaped by the domestic political project of reconciling the Asia-first Republican nationalist, Europe-first liberal internationalist, and realist constituencies inside government and among the broader public.[17]

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

Strategic ideology and domestic politics

[17] For two somewhat different ways of making this case, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 7, and Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, chapters 2-4.

Different types of domestic political systems manifest different ideological propensities in foreign policy. They differ in the degree to which they are ideological, in the content of their ideology, and in the ability to correct their ideologically-driven errors in foreign policy. Even the realist Stephen Walt notes, for example, that revolutionary states are prone to a highly ideological form of foreign relations, conflict-provoking images of their adversaries, and a comparatively painful process of "socialization" to the realities of the international balance of power system.[18] As Walt explains, "revolutionary ideologies should not be seen as wholly different from other forms of political belief," but simply an acute form of normal practices.[19]

Unipolarity - and more generally the lack of strategic constraint - may offer the freedom to indulge in a highly ideological foreign policy, but whether this leeway is exploited depends also on the features of the state's domestic political system: its regime type, the interests of its ruling group, the domestic political incentives associated with foreign policy, and the role of foreign policy ideology in capitalizing on those incentives. In the case of the United States since 1991, the only modern instance of unipolarity, we argue that its democratic regime type is in general a factor moderating the impact of ideology on foreign policy, but that variable features of U.S. domestic politics, such as its recent period of unusual party polarization, worked to undermine that moderation. In this section, we discuss several general hypotheses on the interaction of the international distribution of power and domestic political structure in shaping strategic ideology. In following sections, we look more closely at the more specific impact on strategic ideology of wedge issue tactics under conditions of party polarization.

A useful dictionary definition of ideology is "the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program."[20] A strategic ideology includes assertions about goals and values (e.g., all states should be democracies), categories for defining situations or problems (e.g., the axis of evil;

[18] Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 5, 22-43.
[19] Walt, *Revolution and War*, 29.
[20] *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam, 1969), 413.

weapons of mass destruction), and causal theories or empirical hypotheses (e.g., offense is the best defense; Saddam Hussein is undeterrable; the Arab street will bandwagon with whoever is most powerful). The more integrated these elements are in a coherent package that supports a political program, and the more resistant they are to disconfirming evidence, the more pronounced is their ideological character.

Although virtually all periods of twentieth-century American foreign policy have been influenced to some degree by its liberal ideology, by these criteria the Bush strategy has arguably been more ideological than most. Neo-conservative thinkers have been explicit about their aim to present a coherent sociopolitical program that integrates assertions across the full range of domestic and international issues.[21] Moreover, core supporters of this outlook have been unusually resistant to evidence that others have seen as disconfirming its foreign policy assumptions. Public opinion surveys found that six of ten Bush supporters in the 2004 Presidential election believed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and three of four believed that Iraq had provided substantial support to Al Qaeda.[22] Public opinion scholar Steven Kull says this echoes Leon Festinger's research on the psychology of "cognitive dissonance" in millenarian sects that believed more strongly in the impending end of the world after their prophecies had failed.[23] But Democrats who had initially supported the war were far less prone to these misperceptions, suggesting that that partisan ideological framing reveals more than individual psychology.[24]

The domestic political setting affects strategic ideas and ideologies at several levels. Most basic is the effect of regime type - in particular, whether the

[21] Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (Spring 2005), 112-156; George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004).
[22] Steven Kull, "Americans and Iraq on the Eve of the Presidential Election," Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), October 28, 2004; see also Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 4 (Winter 2003-2004), 569-598.
[23] Leon Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
[24] Democrats should have been under more pressure from cognitive dissonance than Republicans, who could rationalize their support for the war in terms of the partisan imperative to back their own team's policy.

country is a well institutionalized democracy. The traditional view, articulated by Walter Lippmann, portrayed democratic publics as fickle, ill-informed, and swayed by passions rather than reason.[25] In contrast, scholars of the democratic peace now see democracies as strategically astute. The democratic marketplace of ideas evaluates strategies more effectively than do closed authoritarian cabals.[26] As a result, democracies not only do not fight each other, but they also tend to win the wars they start, pay lesser costs in war, choose conflicts more wisely than non-democracies, and learn lessons from imperial setbacks more astutely.

Such claims about the intelligence of democracy have been tarnished by the poor quality of the American public debate between September 11 and the Iraq invasion, especially the failure of the Democratic opposition and the media to mount sustained scrutiny of manipulated intelligence and dubious strategic assertions.[27] Over the long term, however, the system worked more or less as democratic peace theorists would expect: Congressional hearings and journalistic inquiries exposed errors, the disappointing strategic situation in Iraq shifted public opinion against the war, and Democrats exploited this skepticism to gain a Congressional majority in the 2006 election. In this view, democracies make mistakes but eventually correct them. In contrast, non-democratic expansionist great powers like Germany and Japan have been more likely to keep pushing ahead when strategy fails and the costs of expansion rise steeply.[28]

The quality of strategic ideas may be affected not only by the broad regime type, but also by the specific character of the ruling coalition, elite divisions and consensus, and the dynamic of party competition. When the ruling

[25] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).
[26] Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19-25.
[27] Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (summer 2004), 5-48; Ronald Krebs, "Selling the Market Short?" *International Security* 29, no. 4 (spring 2005) and rebuttal by Kaufmann, 196-207. For the an assessment of the argument that democratic publics are only as rational as the information they have, see Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, **"**Challenges to Democratic Competence" (2008).
[28] Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49-52 and chapters 3 and 4.

coalition contains powerful groups with a bureaucratic, commercial, or ideological stake in military expansion, they may use the public relations resources and bully pulpit of national government to promote the "myths of empire" – i.e., the assertions that security requires expansion, offense is the best defense, the enemy is undeterrable but hollow, conquest is cheap and easy, dominoes fall, threats gain allies, and policies that benefit the ruling group also benefit the nation. Although such myth-making is more blatant in undemocratic or semi-democratic regimes, a weaker version of the same dynamic may also color strategic debate in democracies.[29] Where imperial interest groups were well positioned as veto players in democratic empires, they effectively advanced creative rationales to drag their feet on decolonization.[30] Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld revived the domino theory to explain why the U.S. could not withdraw from Iraq, telling the Senate Armed Services Committee that this would lead to a series of challenges from radical movements and that America would wind up fighting closer to home.[31] Unipolarity (or any preponderance of power) should be conducive to selling some of the myths of empire (e.g., the argument that the conquest of Iraq would be, as one enthusiast claimed, "a cakewalk"), but it may complicate the selling of others (e.g., the assertion that a small, distant rogue state threatens the superpower's basic security).

Even in democracies, the strategic ideas of the Executive go essentially unchallenged unless leading figures of the opposition party speak out against them. Media critics and non-governmental experts have little clout on their own. Bipartisan consensus behind the Executive can reflect true agreement on policy, but it can also reflect the opposition's fear of challenging a popular President who has advantages of information, initiative, and symbolism of national unity in a

[29] Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, chapters 5 and 7; Jack Snyder, "Imperial Temptations," *The National Interest* No. 71 (Spring 2003), 29-40.
[30] Hendrik Spruyt, *Ending Empire: Contested Sovereignty and Territorial Partition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); see also Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
[31] According to Rumsfeld, "If we left Iraq prematurely as the terrorists demand, the enemy would tell us to leave Afghanistan and then withdraw from the Middle East. And if we left the Middle East, they'd order us and all those who don't share their militant ideology to leave what they call the occupied Muslim lands from Spain to the Philippines." Testimony of August 3, 2006; subject of a *New York Times* editorial, "The Sound of One Domino Falling," August 4, 2006.

time of crisis. Only one Senate Democrat who faced a close race for re-election in 2002 voted against the resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.[32] Consensus can also reflect a logroll in which potential opponents restrain their criticism in exchange for deference to their interests on other issues. In the late 1940s, before the forging of the Cold War consensus, a large bloc of neo-isolationist Midwestern Republicans and some conservative Southern Democrats were highly skeptical of economic and military commitments to Europe, though they were more inclined to back the Chinese Nationalists against the Communists. Conversely, Eastern internationalists and realist foreign policy professionals like George Kennan had their eye mainly on the struggle for mastery in the power centers of Europe. Acheson's NSC-68 global containment study provided a rationale that forged a consensus among these disparate, mistrustful groups. Unipolarity does not guarantee such consensus, but the vast resources available to the predominant power in the international system can facilitate logrolls in which all objectives - neo-conservative, assertive realist, humanitarian - are addressed simultaneously.

When partisan or intragovernmental divisions do emerge, the side with the greatest propaganda resources wins, says Jon Western's study of American military interventions. These resources include the uniquely persuasive platform of the Presidency, the informational advantages of the contending sides (including access to facts, analytical expertise, persuasive credibility, and access to media), and the duration of the crisis (the longer the crisis, the greater the chance for critics of the Executive to make their case). A successful persuader for intervention needs to convince the public that a credible threat exists and that there is a convincing plan to achieve victory.[33] Unipolarity should make it easier

[32] Douglas C. Foyle, "Leading the Public to War? The Influence of American Public Opinion on the Bush Administration's Decision to Go to War in Iraq," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 16, no. 3 (2004), 284.
[33] Jon Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 14-23.

to convince the public that victory is likely, assuming that the credibility of the threat is not in question. [34]

Western points out that the plausibility of the case for intervention depends in part on the "latent opinion" of the audience, which is colored by expectations formed in the most recent relevant case. The case for attacking Iraq after September 11, for example, was assessed in light of previous confrontations that primed the public to think the worst of Saddam's regime. Latent opinion may also be heavily conditioned by a prevailing strategic frame.[35] For example, universally disseminated and widely accepted Cold War assumptions primed reactions to the spurious Gulf of Tonkin "incident" and to other escalatory moves in the Vietnam conflict. When a ready-made consensual frame is not available, as was the case in the 1990s, the case for intervention is more difficult to make.[36] The elder Bush tried out several frames for the 1991 Gulf War, starting with the threat to oil supplies, which fell flat, and subsequently emphasizing the danger from Saddam's nuclear and chemical programs. What worked best of all was framing through *fait accompli*: Americans decided that war was inevitable once Bush had deployed half a million troops in the Saudi desert, so it was better to get it over with.[37] Even discounting the short-lived "rally 'round the flag" effect at the beginning of a conflict, a *fait accompli* allows the President to argue that American prestige is already at stake and that criticism undermines the morale of "our troops in the field." Unilateral actions of this kind are easier to undertake under unipolarity because of their lesser risk.

---

[34] On the selling of the Iraq intervention, see Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the bush Administration's Rhetoric," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 3 (September 2005), 525-537.

[35] For an innovative treatment of President Bush's framing of the "war on terror," see Ronald R. Krebs and Jennifer K. Lobasz, "Fixing the Meaning of 9/11: Hegemony, Coercion, and the Road to War in Iraq." *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (July-September 2007), 409-451.

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

[37] John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 39, 56-58.

Finally, partisan electoral incentives can affect the motivation and ability of politicians to propound foreign policy ideologies, including doctrines justifying military intervention abroad. International relations scholars have argued that leaders sometimes have incentives to launch a "diversionary war" to distract voters' attention from domestic problems, demonstrate competence through easy victories, or gamble against long odds to salvage their declining reputations.[38] Hard-pressed leaders of collapsing dictatorships or unstable, semi-democratic states might "gamble for resurrection" in this way, but this is too cynical a view of foreign policymaking in stable democracies. However, there may be subtler partisan political attractions of military intervention that do not require so cynical a view of leaders' motives. We argue that national security strategy played this role as a wedge issue for the Bush Administration. Insofar as unipolarity increases the Executive's freedom of action in foreign affairs, it may create opportunities to reframe foreign policy assumptions to advance partisan projects in this way.

National security policy as a wedge issue

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

It is worth stressing what this strategy is *not*. It is *not* just playing to the base; it is also designed to raid the opponent's base. It is *not* shifting the main axis of alignment, but adding an issue orthogonal to that axis. Indeed, a central purpose of the wedge strategy is to gain votes from the off-axis issue that allow the party to win office and thereby achieve policy dominance on the main axis of cleavage. This strategy does *not* necessarily involve moving toward the position of the median voter on the wedge issue. Wedge issues can work if they appeal

[38] Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1996), 133-172.

to the party's base and to an intensely interested segment of the rival party's constituency, even if the majority of voters disagree on the issue, but those who oppose don't switch their votes for that reason. Finally, a wedge issue is *not* what students of American politics call a "valence issue" on which there is consensus. It is what they call a "positional issue," which partisans make salient in a voter's decision by taking a stand that is distinctive from the opponent's. One form of positional issue is an issue on which one of the parties enjoys special credibility, such that highlighting the issue works in its favor even if the opposing party decides belatedly to copy its stance.

In many political systems, the principal axis of partisan alignment has been economic. The richer portion of the voting population seeks to protect its property rights, limit progressive taxation and taxes on capital, and get state subsidies and protection for its business activities; the poorer portion seeks exactly the opposite. General theories of political development, including ones that are very much *au courant*, are based largely on this assumption.[39] Since many of the benefits that the rich seek would accrue only to a small minority of the voters (e.g., repealing the estate tax), achieving a majority in favor of these measures is a daunting task in a political system based on universal suffrage. Extending such economic payoffs down to the second-highest economic quartile is costly, and economic propaganda aimed at the middle class can accomplish only so much. To get what they want in a democracy, economic elites have an incentive to appeal to voters on the basis of a second dimension of cleavage to attract voters that do not share their economic interests.

The quintessential example of this strategy is "playing the ethnic card" in order to "divide and rule." In India, for example, the BJP is a Hindu nationalist party with strong representation among upper caste Hindus. One of their motives has been to protect their economic position and career opportunities against the Congress Party's affirmative action policies for lower castes and

[39] Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

minorities.[40] To succeed, the BJP needs to win votes from precisely the lower caste constituencies that would benefit economically from their defeat. The BJP strategy has been to convince lower caste Hindus that the most important cleavage is not the economic one between lower and upper classes, but rather the religious and cultural one between Hindus and Muslims. To increase the salience of the religious cleavage, they have promoted divisive issues such as the demand to tear down an historic mosque on an allegedly holy Hindu site and build a Hindu temple there. On the eve of close elections in ethnically mixed cities, upper caste Indian politicians have repeatedly staged provocative marches through Muslim neighborhoods, spread false rumors of defilements perpetrated by Muslims, and used hired thugs to start riots.[41] When ethnicity is polarized in this way, the lower castes have voted with the BJP or other ethnically based parties, not as poor people with the Congress or class-based parties. Once the BJP has gained office in a given state, many of their electorate have been disappointed and voted them out in the subsequent election, but the strategy of emphasizing the non-economic cleavage works for a time.

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

Foreign policy can also be used as a wedge issue. This is especially apt if the economic elite really *does* hold a significant foreign policy interest in common with the poorer classes. For example, the coalition of free trade and empire was held together in Britain for a century by the complementary interests of the City of

[40] Susanne Hoeber and Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Modern Hate," *The New Republic*, March 22, 1993, 24-29.
[41] Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

London financiers in capital mobility and the working classes' interest in cheap imported food.[42]

The most common strategy for using foreign policy as a wedge issue is to emphasize looming foreign threats that are alleged to overshadow domestic class divisions. This works especially well for elites when it can be combined with two other claims. The first is that concessions to elite economic interests are necessary on national security grounds. Thus, the Wilhelmine German elite coalition of "iron and rye" argued that a battle fleet and agricultural protection were needed in case of war with perfidious Britain. The second is the claim that domestic critics of the government are a fifth column for the external enemy. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, for example, attacked Democrats who accused them of misleading the nation about Iraqi weapons programs, calling their criticisms "deeply irresponsible" and suggesting that they were undermining the war effort and abetting terrorism.[43] Although Democrats tried to neutralize this charge by supporting many of the Bush policies on terrorism and Iraq, the Republicans' longstanding hawkishness initially gave them greater credibility as stewards of the "war on terror." Thus, their wedge strategy was difficult to counter.

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

For a wedge strategy to achieve its purpose, it must leave the ruling elite free to carry out its economic policy agenda. This is easiest if the economic policy rationale can be directly tied, as the Wilhelmine elites did, to the logic of the second cleavage issue. It is hardest if the foreign policy undermines the rationale for the economic policy, but even then creative rhetoric might sell it. For example, Ronald Reagan managed to reconcile tax cuts for the wealthy and the

[42] Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 76-83.
[43] On Bush, see Richard W. Stevenson, "Bush Contends Partisan Critics Hurt War Effort," *New York Times*, November 12, 2005, A1, A10; Cheney said in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 8, 2004, that if Americans elect Kerry, "then the danger is that we'll get hit again…in a way that will be devastating from the standpoint of the United States."

600 ship navy through the logic of supply side economics, which rationalized the resulting budget deficits as good for growth. The intellectual cohesiveness of this package was also enhanced by the symbolic connection between "free enterprise" (that is, freed from tax-and-spend government) and the "free world" (militarily powerful enough to stay free from the Communist threat), both well established tropes of Cold War ideology.

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

A well institutionalized network of policy analysts helps the intellectual frame underpinning a wedge strategy to take hold and endure. Neo-conservatives invested heavily in policy research institutes, human capital, and media presence that created and promoted an unusually integrated set of ideas across economic, social, and foreign policy questions.[44] This effort explained how the non-economic wedge issues were part of a coherent worldview that included the economic dimension as well, decreasing the risk that issues on the secondary axes would simply replace the primary one.

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

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

September 11, and neo-conservative ideological priming were in that sense the perfect political opportunity.

Polarization and wedge issue politics

In a one-dimensional policy spectrum where voter preferences bunch toward the middle, parties must become more moderate to attract more votes. Since the 1975, American party competition has reflected the opposite strategy, despite the fact that the underlying distribution of voter preferences on issues and liberal-conservative ideology remains bell-shaped. Politicians and activists in both parties have declined to moderate their appeals to attract the independent median voter, and instead have emphasized ideologically assertive stances in order to mobilize their party base. Karl Rove says, "there is no middle!"[45] As a complement to this strategy, they have sought to peel off targeted constituencies from the opposing camp by emphasizing secondary cleavages. Until September 11, these wedge issues were mainly social or racial. Subsequently, foreign policy was added to the repertoire.

Unlike the competition for the median voter described in the theory of Anthony Downs, this works not through moderation but through polarization.[46] To make a secondary cleavage salient, a party's stance needs to be distinctive enough to make it worthwhile for a voter to choose based on that dimension.[47] Wedge issue politics is a politics of divisive position-taking.

Students of American politics agree that the political parties' stances on issues have become increasingly polarized in domestic issue areas since 1975, and party identification has become increasingly correlated with ideology on the liberal-conservative dimension. This is true despite the fact that public attitudes are not substantially less moderate than before. What has happened is that the two parties put forward policy platforms that are more ideologically differentiated than they were in the past. The Republican party has moved far to the right, and

[45] Lemann, "The Controller."
[46] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).
[47] Fiorina, *Culture Wars*, 167-182.

the Democratic party has moved somewhat to the left.[48] As a result, voters have been re-sorting themselves, with liberal Republicans becoming Democrats and conservative Democrats becoming Republicans.[49] Elites, especially party leaders and activists, are more polarized in their views than the public at large, which suggests that elites are taking the initiative in the polarization process.[50]

Contributing to this process was the breakup of the Democratic "solid South" as a result of the civil rights revolution. Gradually, southern whites who remained in the Democratic Party under the logroll of racial segregation and New Deal social programs have moved into the Republican Party. White Republican southerners disproportionately embody a number of the characteristics of the polarizing conservative syndrome: increasingly affluent, traditional in religion and morals, resistant to programs designed to improve the situation of African Americans, and hawkish on foreign policy.[51] Statistically, region accounts for a substantial proportion of the polarization effect. However, polarization has also occurred outside the South, so that is not the whole explanation. Several hypotheses are in play.

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal argue that polarization was mainly the result of the large increase in the number of affluent Americans who no longer need the governmental social safety net. They have voted their economic interests at the expense of immigrants who use social programs but lack the vote to defend them.[52] The result is a Republican coalition that blocks efforts to redistribute benefits to the less well-off and a dramatic increase in economic inequality. These authors also see soft money from ideologically extreme campaign contributors as a secondary cause of polarization.

---

[48] McCarty et al., *Polarized America*, 11.
[49] Fiorina, 57-77.
[50] Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy," in Morton H. Halperin, Jeffrey Laurenti, Peter Rundlet, and Spencer P. Boyer, eds. *Power and Superpower: Global Leaderrship and Exceptionalism in the 21st Century* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2007), pp. 49-68.
[51] Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 41-44.
[52] McCarty et al, 108, and chapter 4.

Other authors point to the political turmoil of the late 1960s, which led to the increased adoption of primary elections instead of conventions and caucuses to determine each party's candidates for the general election.[53] At the same time, cohorts of ideologically motivated activists took over from an earlier generation of pragmatic politicians in both parties. Increasingly, the winning candidates appealed to the median voter in the party's primary rather than the median voter in the general election. Mobilizing one's own base with ideologically purist causes and attacking the opposition's base with wedge issues became the new prevailing strategy. This worked in part because both parties were doing it simultaneously; the median voter had no attractive option. As a result, some public opinion research suggests a substantial decline in office-holders' responsiveness to changes in public opinion over recent decades.[54]

Polarization developed at different rates for different issue areas. Polarization on economic issues was already central to the New Deal cleavage structure, and that has remained largely unchanged. Income level is the strongest predictor of the vote even of "born again" evangelicals in the South.[55]

Polarization based on economic issues presents an endemic problem for Republicans, because a majority of American voters *always* says it wants the government to "do more" on big ticket items such as supporting education, health care, and the environment. Even at the low ebb of support for big-government liberalism when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, about half of the public said the government was spending too little on such items and only a tenth said it was spending too much.[56] Even most Americans who self-identify as "conservative" are operationally liberal in the sense that they want government to spend more money on such programs.[57] This conflicted group comprises 22% of the entire electorate.[58]

---

[53] James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jacobs and Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander*, 17-19.
[54] Jacobs and Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander*, chapter 2.
[55] McCarty et al, *Polarized America*, 108.
[56] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 7.
[57] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, chapter 3.
[58] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 90.

The fact that most Americans want liberal spending policies by an activist government puts Republicans in a chronic bind. One rhetorical solution has been to emphasize conservative symbols, including patriotism, which resonate more strongly than liberal symbols with the majority of voters.[59] On the symbol of "big government," most Americans agree with the Republicans, but on actual big-government policies, they usually agree with the Democrats.

A second solution has been to use non-economic wedge issues to try to overcome the chronic Republican disadvantage on economic issues. The Republicans have tried out a series of these issues in attempts to increase the party fold without having to compromise on their basic economic platform, starting with race and affirmative action from 1964 to 1980, and then shifting to conservative stances on gender and abortion issues.[60] Polarization on social and cultural values issues such as abortion, gay rights, and the role of religion in public life increased further in the 1990s.

This strategy achieved mixed results. Larry Bartels calculates that the Republicans' electoral payoff from the abortion issue has declined among non-college-educated white voters since 1996. Among this group, the impact of seven cultural wedge issues—abortion, gun control, school vouchers, gay marriage, the death penalty, immigration, and gender—on voting in the 2004 election was about two-thirds that of a comparable set of economic issues. In contrast, defense spending and military intervention ranked near the top of the list of politically potent issues.[61] Preventive war on global terrorism became the new wedge issue, picking up where social issues left off.

Foreign policy was for a long time the laggard in polarization. Support for the Vietnam War declined in lockstep among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Democratic support briefly decline more steeply when Vietnam became Nixon's war in 1969, but the Republican trend caught up by 1971.[62] The

[59] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 94-95.
[60] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 71-74.
[61] Larry M. Bartels, "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter with Kansas*?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (2006), 218.
[62] John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 119.

partisan difference averaged only 5%.[63] Partisan differences in support for the Korean, Persian Gulf, Kosovo, and Afghanistan wars were also relatively small, with the Gulf War recording the greatest difference, averaging about 20%.[64] The Reagan period widened the divergence in foreign policy views between Republicans and Democrats, but the gap closed again with the end of the Cold War.[65] Even at the peak divergence in the 1980s, the two parties remained "parallel publics:" their attitudes moved in the same direction over time in response to events.[66]

There are two main reasons for the lag in partisan polarization in foreign policy. First, Democratic foreign policy establishment figures such as Zbigniew Brzezinski remained well within the Cold War consensus in response to Soviet military buildups and Soviet adventures in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Although the Republicans had a post-Vietnam advantage as the more credible party on national defense, their politically exploitable wedge on this issue remained limited. Second, the end of the Cold War left Americans without a convincing frame for foreign policy as a wedge issue, and notwithstanding the Gulf War, no sufficiently galvanizing threat triggered the formulation of a new one during the 1990s.

Despite the neo-conservatives' ideological preparations in the 1990s for a more polarizing foreign policy, the initial months of the Bush Administration still provided no opportunity to push to implement it. The Bush Administration took office with a mixed foreign affairs team of cautious realists like Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, traditional Cold War hawks like Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, neo-conservative idealists like Undersecretary of Defense Paul

---

[63] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 132.
[64] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 134-138.
[65] Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004), 168-174.
[66] Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 7; Peter Trubowitz and Nicole Mellow, "Going Bipartisan: Politics by Other Means," *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (Fall 2005), 433-455, figure 2; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon, "Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy," Jacobson, *A Divider*, 7-9

Wolfowitz, and an uncommitted President who had argued for a restrained foreign policy during the campaign. The idea of unilaterally asserting American primacy to forestall the development of new post-Cold War power centers in Europe or Asia was an old one for this group. Under the elder Bush, Wolfowitz had been too bold in putting that idea at the center of a draft Defense Guidance document, and the document was suppressed. During the 1990s, neo-conservative intellectuals and pundits wrote openly about the use of the "unipolar moment" to reshape global politics to America's liking, by force if necessary. Still, the moment was not right: Republicans shied away from "nation building" in the developing world, associating it with quixotic do-gooder Democrats. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were on record as calling for regime change in Iraq, but so was Bill Clinton. Rice had argued prominently in favor of deterring Saddam from further aggression, implying that he was in fact deterrable.[67] Nonetheless, after a decade of Iraqi defiance over no-fly zones and inspections, the public was well primed for the possibility of a renewed war with Saddam's regime: in February 2001, 52% favored "military action to force Saddam Hussein from power if it would result in substantial U.S. military casualties;" 42% were opposed.[68]

September 11 and the wedge politics of the Bush doctrine

September 11 created the opportunity not only to depose Saddam but also to dramatically reframe American foreign policy in a way that would unleash conservative Republican principles for purposes that would resonate broadly with the American public. The new doctrine, unveiled in the President's West Point speech in July 2002 and codified in the September 2002 National Security Strategy memorandum, argued that in an era of global terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the United States could not wait to be attacked;

[67] She wrote that "the first line of defense should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence—if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration." Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January/February 2000), 61. More generally, see George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), chapters 1 and 2.
[68] Foyle, "Leading the Public to War?" 274.

it needed to attack preventively to transform states that harbor terrorists and other rogue states into cooperative democracies. The United States would act unilaterally if necessary: it would explain its ideas to the world, but it would not ask for a "permission slip" to "shift the balance of power in favor of freedom."[69] These ideas were presented as relevant not only to the struggle against Al Qaeda, but to the "axis of evil" of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, to an open-ended "global war on terror," and even to promotion of democracy in China.

This was the ultimate wedge issue. The Bush doctrine was well prepared ideologically by neo-conservative thinkers. It was grounded in the hawkish, unilateralist instincts of the Republican elites and their conservative base, including the traditionally military-oriented South. Ideologically and psychologically, it resonated with the Republicans' instincts to be tough on domestic threats and evil-doers: e.g., their characteristic hard-line stance on crime, the death penalty, and social deviance of all kinds. It neutralized criticism from liberal Democrats through its promotion of democracy. It exploited what scholars of public opinion call a "valence" (or consensus) issue - the overriding security issues of concern to all Americans after September 11 - but it went far beyond that. The application of the doctrine to Iraq, well primed among the public, would demonstrate better than the too-easy Afghan mission that this was a problem-solving concept of wide utility. Thus, Iraq was a "positional issue" that would differentiate Republican from Democratic policies, hold the Republican base, and gain some votes among Independents and Democrats who could be convinced of the high priority of this issue.[70] To accomplish this, however, Iraq would have to be seen as part of the bigger picture. Asked how voters would view the Iraq issue in the 2004 election, Rove said, "they will see the battle for Iraq as a chapter in a longer, bigger struggle, as a part of the war on terrorism."[71]

Unipolarity helped to make the wedge issue feasible. America's unipolar power made implementation seem low risk and low cost, especially important to Rumsfeld's plan for a streamlined, more useable army. If this worked, and the

[69] Lakoff, 11; The Office of the President, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002.
[70] Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 62, on valence and positional issues.
[71] Lemann, "The Controller."

Administration could see no reason why it wouldn't, the strategy might transform the Middle East, and at the same time give the Republicans a lock on American politics as the principled, problem-solving party.

An early glimpse of the political benefits that the strategy might bring was evident in the Congressional elections of 2002. In pre-election polls, notes Gary Jacobson, "most respondents thought the Democrats would do a better job dealing with health care, education, Social Security, prescription drug benefits, taxes, abortion, unemployment, the environment, and corporate corruption," and the Republicans "with terrorism, the possibility of war with Iraq, the situation in the Middle East, and foreign affairs generally."[72] Bush's popularity scared off well qualified Democratic challengers: only a tenth of Republican incumbents faced Democratic challengers who had ever held public elective office, as opposed to the usual figure of a quarter.[73] On the eve of the election, Rove is said to have recommended pushing for a largely unconditional Senate endorsement of the use of force against Iraq, rather than accepting greater bipartisan backing for the somewhat more equivocal Biden-Lugar bill.[74] In classic wedge-issue style, Rove wanted the sharpest possible difference between Republicans and Democrats in order to heighten the political salience of the war vote relative to economic concerns. Overall, Rove's private PowerPoint presentation on campaign strategy advised Republican candidates to "focus on the war."[75] Buoyed by a huge turnout among the Republican base, the Republicans picked up six seats in the House and two in the Senate, bucking the normal tendency for parties in power to slip in mid-term elections.

These political benefits could not be sustained because of the failure to pacify Iraq and the unraveling of the central public rationales for the war - Saddam's alleged WMD and support for Al Qaeda. In retrospect, it seems clear that Bush would have done far better politically by focusing on the "war on terror" and staying out of Iraq. The 19% of voters who said that terrorism was the most

[72] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 89.
[73] Jacobson, 89, note 30.
[74] Packer, *Assassin's Gate*, 388.
[75] James Carney, "General Karl Rove, Reporting for Duty," *Time Magazine*, September 29, 2002.

important issue voted heavily for Bush in 2004, but the 15% of voters who identified Iraq as the key issue voted disproportionately for Kerry.[76] Despite the electoral drag of Iraq, support for Bush on the war on terror provided his margin of victory in 2004 in the face of skepticism about his economic agenda.[77] Instead of exploiting the Iraq war as a wedge issue, the Bush Administration had instead created the most polarizing issue ever in the history of American foreign policy—and one that ultimately worked to the Republicans' disadvantage.

The polarizing consequences of the war

After some initial months of bipartisan support, the partisan divergence in support for the Iraq War ranged between 40% and 90% depending on the question asked.[78] The gap between Republicans and Democrats also widened across a broad range of foreign policy issues, and their views sometimes moved in opposite directions in response to new information. In 1998, 31 percent of Republicans believed that the planet was warming, but by 2006 only 26% did, whereas Democrats increased from 39 to 46% and Independents from 31 to 45%.[79] Partisans increasingly lived in conceptually different foreign policy worlds.

On the first day of the war, the Bush Administration had the support of 73% of respondents, but support among Democrats remained soft and conditional: 51% of them said they supported having gone to war, but only 38%

---

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

[77] Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "Voters and Values in the 2004 election," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69, no. 5 (2005, special issue): 744-59; Sunshine D. Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 38 (April 2005), 201-209.

[78] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 131-3; *New York Times*, March 27, 2006.

[79] ABC News/Time/Stanford poll, *Global Warming*, March 26, 2006.

supported the troops *and* the policy, whereas 12% supported the troops but opposed the policy. If the war and Iraqi democracy had gone well, the weakness of the WMD and Al Qaeda tie rationales might not have mattered. In the brief moment in March 2003 when a cheap, quick victory seemed assured, the proportion saying that the war would have been worth it even if no WMD were found jumped 20 percentage points among Republicans and 10 points among Democrats and independents. Success might have been its own justification, strategically and politically. But this was not to be.

Attitude trends after the invasion confirm that Democratic and independent support was conditional on the WMD and terrorism rationales, whereas Republicans were largely unaffected by new evidence on this. In February 2003, 79% of Democrats believed that Iraq had WMD, and fifteen months later only 33% did. In contrast, as late as 2005, Republican belief in WMD actually increased to 81%. Between April 2003 and October 2005, belief in Saddam's involvement in 9/11 declined among Republicans from 65 to 44%, among independents from 51 to 32%, and among Democrats from 49 to 25%.[80] Coinciding with these trends, an unprecedented 60% gap opened up between Republicans and Democrats during 2004 and 2005 on whether the war had been "the right thing to do" or "worth the cost," with independents in between but closer to the Democrats. In April 2004, Democrats were most skeptical of the two rationales for war: of the 58% of Democrats who believed neither, only 8% thought the war had been the right thing to do. In contrast, the 34% of Republicans who were white "born again" Evangelical Christians supported the war at an unchanging rate of 85% and accepted the Administration's rationales for it unquestioningly. Not surprisingly, self-proclaimed conservative ideology was also a strong predictor of support for both the war and the Bush rationales for it.[81]

Were the Republicans becoming so ideological in their view of foreign affairs that they were impervious to information, or were they realistic, but dogged partisans sticking with their team as the best strategy in the face of

[80] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 140-1.
[81] Jacobson, *A Divider*, 144, 155-159.

adversity? And if they were increasingly ideological, was this a spontaneous reflection of grassroots thinking, a consequence of the Bush Administration's neo-conservative framing of foreign policy ideology, or simply a measure of who was left in the party after three decades of polarized sorting? Is the highly ideological foreign policy stance of the Republican base a passing phenomenon of the Bush era, or has it become locked in by political strategy or ideological internalization?

These questions cannot be answered definitively, but an analysis of the unprecedented polarization of foreign affairs attitudes during the Bush presidency suggests an elite-driven ideological pattern. Democrats increasingly self-identified as liberal and Republicans as conservative. Moreover, people increasingly decided their views on specific issues based on their prior partisan and ideological commitments. During the early 1990s, panel data had shown that changes in respondents' attitudes on specific issues had a reciprocal effect on changes in their party identification, with a significant influence in both directions.[82] In contrast, panel data including both domestic and foreign policy issues from 2000, 2002, and 2004 showed that the effect of changes of party identification and of general ideology on specific issue attitudes overwhelms the reverse effect. (See Table 1.) This finding is consistent with the view that Bush's highly ideological framing of both domestic and foreign issues effectively polarized the way people evaluate these issues, whether positively or negatively, along partisan and ideological lines. Since this finding rests on data about changes in the attitudes of individuals rather than aggregates, it would not seem consistent with the view that the changes are simply the result of sorting individuals into ideologically homogeneous parties through the polarized policies offered by the parties' candidates.[83]

A comparison of the 1998, 2002, 2004, and 2006 Chicago Council on Global Affairs (formerly knows as the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations)

[82] Geoffrey C. Layman and Thomas Carsey, "Party Polarization and 'Conflict Extension' in the American Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (October 2002), 786-802.

[83] While party identification and ideology appear to affect *individual* issue opinions much more than the reverse, further data analysis could not reject the possibility of an effect on partisanship and ideology of simultaneous opinion changes on *multiple* issues.

surveys of elite and mass attitudes shows an unprecedented level of partisan and ideological polarization on key foreign policy issues across the board, not just Iraq.[84] On several issues, the vectors of change correspond closely to policy leadership by the Bush Administration, suggesting a top-down process of attitude change. The elite surveys show increasing polarization on maintaining superior military power worldwide and on spreading democracy abroad, goals which have become the centerpiece of the neoconservative agenda. In 1998, 31 percent more Republican than Democratic elites thought maintaining superior military power was a "very important" foreign policy goal; this gap rose by 18 points to about 49 percent in 2004. In 1998 and 2002, more Democratic than Republican elites thought democracy promotion was a very important goal, but by 2004, after the Bush Administration increased its stress on democratization as a rationale for the Iraq war and the Bush doctrine, these opinions reversed, with 14 percent more Republican than Democratic leaders holding this view. The Bush Administration stance against the International Criminal Court has also led to an increasing partisan elite divergence, rising from 38 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2004. The gap on this issue between self-identified conservatives versus liberals rose in 2004 to 54 percent. Overall, for the 62 questions asked of elites, we find 17 cases of partisan divergence and six cases of partisan convergence. Ideological divergence and convergence occurred in eleven cases each.

Mass public respondents are somewhat less divided by party but more divided by

ideology. Based on responses to 122 questions, Democrats and Republicans diverged

[84] The surveys interviewed samples of the American public and a sample of leaders who have foreign policy powers, specialization, or expertise. The leaders include members of Congress or their senior staff, presidential administration officials and senior staff in agencies or offices dealing with foreign policy issues, university administrators or academics who teach in the area of international relations, journalists and editorial staff who handle international news, presidents of large labor unions, business executives of Fortune 1000 corporations, religious leaders, presidents of major private foreign policy organizations, and presidents of major special interest groups relevant to foreign policy. Marshall M. Bouton et al., *Global views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). For a fuller analysis, see Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon, "Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy," There was a public survey but no elite survey for 2006.

more than nine percentage points on 19 questions between 1998 and 2004, and converged on only four questions. Self-identified liberals and conservatives diverged on 23 questions and converged on nine. Partisan divergence emerged in particular on defense spending, foreign military aid, gathering intelligence information about other countries, strengthening the United Nations, combating international terrorism, and maintaining superior military power worldwide. From 2002 to 2004, Republicans moved from 6 percentage points to 20 points more likely than Democrats to favor toppling regimes that supported terrorist groups. Figures 1-3 show some of the trends based on responses to the question: "Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all: Strengthening the United Nations? Combating international terrorism? Maintaining superior military power worldwide?" The widening gap between Democrats and Republicans from 1998 through 2006 is quite clear, with Democrats and Independents moving away from the opinions of Republican in the cases of considering maintaining superior military power and combating international terrorism as "very important" foreign policy goals. In the case of strengthening the UN as an international institution, by 2006 Republicans were 21 percentage points less supportive than Democrats of this goal, 28% to 49%, compared to an 11 point gap in 1998. This partisan divergence extends into global environmental issues as well. From 1998 to 2006, the percentage of Republicans who thought global warming was a "critical threat" to the vital interests of the U.S. dropped, surprisingly, from 39% to 30%, *down* 9 points. In sharp contrast, the percentage of Democrats who gave the same response increased from 51% to 62%, *up* more than 10 points.

In sum, there is evidence for increasing partisan and ideological differences among both elites and the public. This has occurred more widely and sharply among elites, but these divisions have penetrated the public as well. Elite polarization seems directly driven by the policy commitments of the President. Mass-level polarization is harder to interpret. It might reflect a more

diffuse impact of Presidential framing of issues through broad ideology rather than through specific policies, but it might also be influenced by unrelated grassroots trends.

In a further effort to assess whether public polarization is mainly responding to Presidential framing or to popular currents of opinion, we conducted a factor analysis to see which issues, based on the American National Election Study data, seem more tightly linked to party, ideology, and each other. We found that issues that have been central to the President's rhetoric and policy agenda - the Iraq war and tax cuts - were most tightly linked in this way. In contrast, attitudes on issues like the death penalty, which has not been central to the Bush Administration's framing efforts, were more loosely tied to the others. Although the Bush doctrine seems to have failed as an enduring wedge issue for Republican partisan advantage, its polarizing effect may be more long-lived if it has become embedded in Republican grassroots ideology.

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

Does unipolarity per se free the United States to use force abroad cheaply and successfully, and thus make war more likely? No. As the United States is learning, war can still be politically and economically costly for a sole superpower. However, under unipolarity, the immediate, self-evident costs and risks of war are more likely to *seem* manageable, especially for a militarily dominant power like the U.S. This does not necessarily make the use of force cheap or wise, but it means that the costs and risks of the use of force are comparatively indirect, long-term, and thus highly subject to interpretation. This interpretive leeway may open the door to domestic political impulses that lead the unipolar power to overreach its capabilities.

Unipolarity opened a space for interpretation that tempted a highly ideological foreign policy cohort to seize on international terrorism as an issue to transform the balance of power in both the international system and American party politics. This cohort had its hands near the levers of power on September 11, 2001, as a result of three decades of partisan ideological polarization on

domestic issues. Its response to the terrorist attack was grounded in ideological sincerity but also in routine practices of wedge issue politics. From conviction and from tactical habit, successful Republican politicians had learned that polarizing on non-economic issues is a political necessity in a country where most voters want costly welfare-state policies that are at odds with the upper-income tax cuts that are the bread and butter of the Republicans' central constituency. Because even America's great power was insufficient to the task that the Bush strategists set for it, their wedge strategy was only briefly successful in winning elections. However, so far their approach seems to have had a more lasting effect in deepening the ideological polarization of American party politics.

If our theoretical analyses are right, what predictions follow for the future of American strategy under conditions of unipolarity? The politics of foreign policy in the Bush era reflected the rare convergence of unipolarity with a galvanizing threat and a party governing with a highly distinctive domestic strategy of ideological polarization and wedge politics. Unipolarity is likely to look very different as those ancillary conditions change.

If party polarization diminishes and the parties increasingly compete by trying to attract the average voter, we would predict a lessening in the ideological character of American foreign policy and an increasingly prudence in its use of force abroad. Party polarization over foreign affairs may continue for a time because of the lingering effects of sorting and ideological internalization, but polarization is not structurally inevitable. Polarization and wedge issue politics was *an* equilibrium, not *the* only possible equilibrium, that emerged from the particular legacies of the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the Vietnam War. Even if the Republican Party retains some incentives to continue such a strategy, the success of a militarized, unilateralist foreign policy as a political wedge issue depends on the existence of a galvanizing threat and on devising a foreign policy that really works as an answer to it. After the sobering experience of Iraq, domestic social questions like religion or immigration may

seem more attractive as wedge issues because their costs and risks can be more easily controlled.

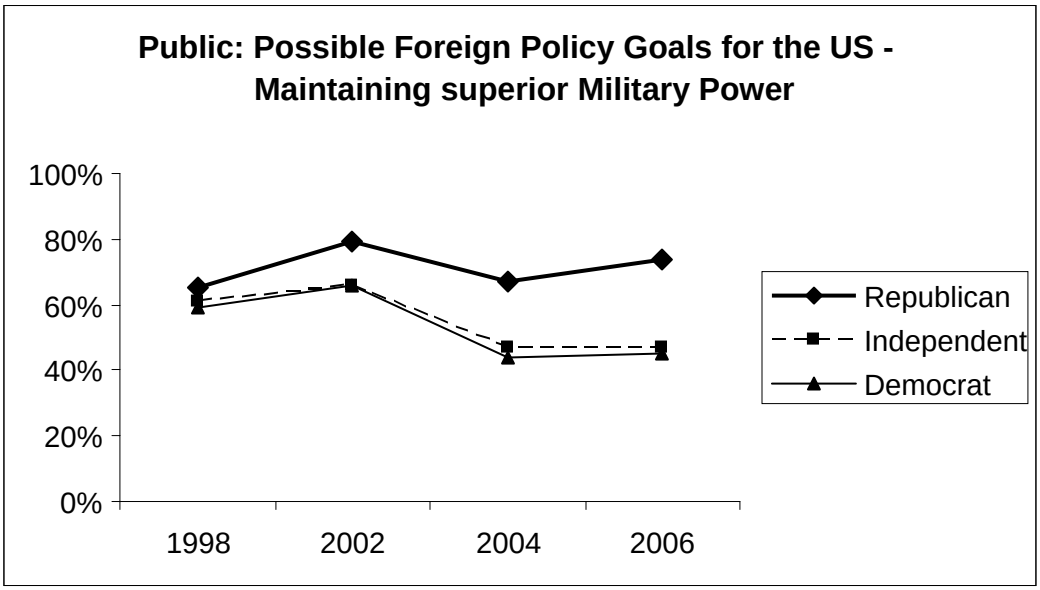
Despite the temptations of unipolarity, the intelligence and prudence of democracy is far from exhausted. The US has not applied the preventive war doctrine to the cases of North Korea and Iran. Although Bush was re-elected in 2004, shifting public views on the war played a central role in the Democratic victory in the 2006 Congressional election. At least among the majority of Democratic and independent voters, democratic checks on an overextended foreign policy are working more or less as the "democratic marketplace of ideas" theory expects. After the 2008 elections, it seems plausible that the domestic politics of unipolarity will cease to be dominated by the distinctive logic of polarized wedge issue politics and instead will reflect the more general prudence of democratic foreign policy.

Table 1. Reciprocal effects of party identification and policy opinions

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

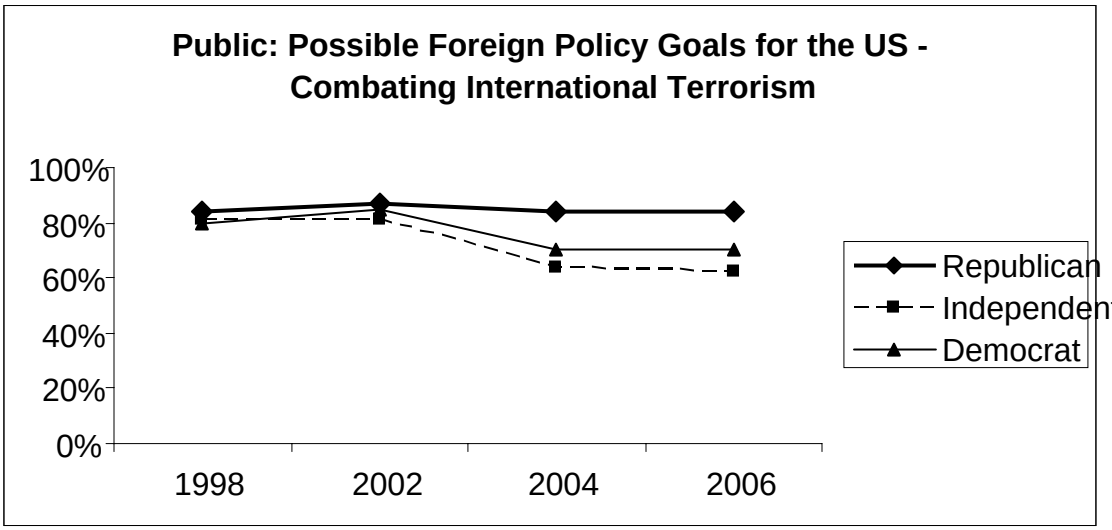
Policy Issue	Effect of Party on Opinion Change (t-value, *p<05)	Effect of Opinion on Party ID Change (t-value, *p<05)
Affirmative action	2.36*	0.95
Equal pay for women	3.70*	0.62
Social security spending	2.39*	0.67
"Welfare" spending	3.33*	1.79
Child care spending	2.97*	0.18
Aid to poor people	2.92*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

Figure 1



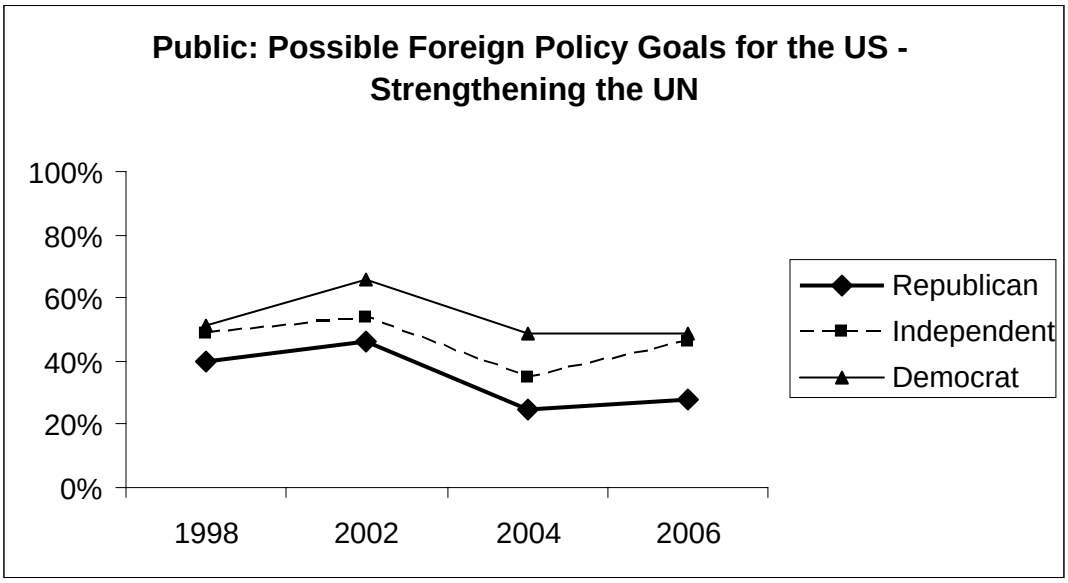
Note: See text.

Figure 2



Note: See text.

Figure 3



Note: See text.