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KNOWLEDGE: CLAIMS
OF POLITICAL THREAT,
RISK, COST, AND
BENEFIT

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The Iraq War and the Discursive Construction of Knowledge: claims of political threat, risk, cost, and benefit¹

Kerstin Lueck, Gordon Chang²

Abstract

Political concepts pertaining to *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* are often constructed and proffered by ‘experts’ with glowing credentials and extensive investigative resources. In Gramsci’s terms, these experts are a type of “intellectual” that serves political functions. Despite the appearance of objectivity and impartiality, technical assessments within policy circles are hardly analytically neutral or value-free. In this research study we critically analyze the discourse utilized by the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) and U.S. politicians – in both public media appearances and official governmental documents – to show the methods by which appointed experts and politicians affirmed the existence of an Iraqi threat in the absence of physical evidence for weapons of mass destruction stockpiles or active weapons programs. Furthermore, the goal is to analyze how these experts and U.S. politicians created certified knowledge – that is, knowledge claims about *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* – that helped political leaders to justify the Coalition’s invasion of Iraq.

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Introduction

Political conceptions pertaining to *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* often acquire a highly objective appearance in today's public political discourse. The apparent neutrality and impartiality are enabled by the use of technical language by highly qualified experts and trained technicians, coupled by the mobilization of elaborate and specialized investigative machineries.

Despite the appearance of objectivity and impartiality, technical assessments within policy circles are hardly analytically neutral or value-free. For example, when defense policy experts argued about the worthiness of using atomic bombs against Japan, the risk to engage in a nuclear arms race with the U.S.S.R., or the strategic benefits to conduct Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covert operation programs in Latin America, human and moral factors were often removed from consideration because of the discursive regimes and boundaries enacted among experts (Cohn 1987; Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly 1990; Gusterson 1996, 2004). Similarly, when domestic, migration, and foreign policies are enacted in the name of 'national security', other interests (e.g., human rights, privacy, equality, morality, transparency) are often de-prioritized because certified threats – often hyperbolic – receive privileged consideration (Huysmans 2006; Bajc and Lint 2011; Lueck et al. 2015). The technical and allegedly impartial calculation of *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* by experts swamps the 'emotional', moral, and civil rights discourse employed by advocates.

The practices by which *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* in U.S. politics are given objective appearance by technical experts and politicians is the topic of this study. Specifically, we examine the discourse utilized by the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) and its chief officers during 2003–2004, as well as how their interpretations were adopted in the discursive texts of the Bush Administration. We show the methods by which ISG experts helped to affirm the existence of the Iraqi threat and legitimate the Coalition's invasion.

This study is especially important because the justification for the Coalition's invasion and Iraq's threat were made by ISG experts, President Bush, Secretary Powell, and many other political leaders in the absence of physical evidence for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) stockpiles or an active nuclear weapons program in Iraq. Examining this case, then, sheds light on the nature of 'scientized politics', the epistemic and representational activities of experts in political institutions, and the need for developing global standards and institutions to assess and respond to claims of international threat and WMD possession.

Discursive Manipulation and the Rise of Scientized Politics

Discursive Manipulation and Rational Decision-Making

Justifications for waging war have often involved political actors manipulating public political discourse to establish a uniform point of view within the government, the state, and beyond (Le Bon 1985 [1896]; Edelman 1971, 1988; Jowett and O'Donnell 1999; Kellner 2003, 2005; Kaufmann 2004; Huysmans 2006). In this paper we seek to go beyond accounts that address subconscious or emotive mechanisms of discursive manipulation; instead, we focus on a model that relates to many conscious, intellectual, and calculative activities within human cognition.

Many authors on political manipulation emphasize the subconscious or emotive aspects of human cognition. Emphasizing the primitive sentiments of an unthinking crowd, Gustave Le Bon (1985

[1896]) claimed that the use of simple, unambiguous messages, repetitive exposure, and visualized stories are the secret to successful propaganda. He hypothesized that these types of simplistic, provocative, and repetitive representations have more powerful appeals than arguments and nuances.

Concerning the Cold War era, Cohn (1987) and Gusterson (1996) show that the micro-practices by experts and professionals in the U.S. defense establishment helped to legitimate lethal policies, including the use of nuclear weapons and other WMD. They point out the practice of developing and adopting ‘euphemisms’ – the use of terms that mask the extent of human suffering to legitimize military action and war. The military has also supported the production of films, video games, news, and live broadcasts (sometimes derived from ‘embedded journalists’) to influence public perception (Robb 2004; Kellner 2003, 2005; Ottosen 2008).

The advancement of discourse manipulation techniques seems to exist side by side with the increase of mechanisms that would purportedly ensure rational decision-making. Kaufmann (2004) discusses the popular perception toward Western democracies, such as the United States, as rational decision-makers. This perception develops because politics seems to be mediated and governed by an open marketplace of ideas. The abundant flow of information and theoretically free expression of different voices in the marketplace of ideas supposedly helps to avoid irrational or mendacious approaches in foreign policy because supposedly all evidence and reasoning is subject to public evaluation and debate (Snyder 1991; Kaufmann 2004). Exaggeration of threat, unwarranted use of lethal force, and false claims of international incidents would be easily scrutinized by the mass media, political skeptics, civic groups, and interested individuals who also have direct access to substantially the same information proffered by the state.

The ‘rational’ image of industrialized, Western countries is also bolstered by the presumed ubiquity of rationalist discourse, which – matching Max Weber’s concept of rationalization – can be characterized as an increased production and circulation of documents, reports, and data processed by evermore experts with an ever higher level of professional qualification. As a result of these conditions, new modes of discursive manipulation emerge in order to proffer state ideology. This task requires the proper use of experts by the state. Indeed, scholars have highlighted at least four special, positional advantages that trained professionals have in the sphere of public political discourse when they are used by the state; these advantages may be used to steer what Habermas (1984 [1981]) has termed “communicative rationality” in civic discussions, ultimately distorting “rational” decision-making processes (both in an instrumental and a moral sense). First, these experts benefit from learned knowledge (Kuklick 2006), since their professionalization entails the development of extremely specialized expertise, as well as sophisticated data-processing and delivery skills (Sarfatti Larson 1977). Second, these professionals, having an ascribed “knowledge position” in society (Horsbøl 2010), add rational-legal authority to an argument so that the decisions appear to be science- and evidence-based, instead of biased, personal, or peculiar (Boswell 2009: 118–124). Third, they help politicians evade the charges of “lying” or ignorance or incompetence by providing textual interpretations and opinions that can be easily cited (Boswell 2009: 136). Fourth, their presence silences criticisms from those speakers in the marketplace with lesser expertise by invoking specialized terms and credentials (Cohn 1987; Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly 1990). Overall, these experts belong to new “intellectual” institutions that serve particular political functions – namely, the shaping of “the complex of superstructures” of society (Gramsci 2003 [1971]: 12).

Certainly, experts can positively contribute to public discussion, if they introduce relevant information, created through analysis, “speak truth to power”, and “clarify the grounds of public debate” (Schudson 2006). In other words, they can potentially direct their knowledge toward “problem-solving”, a position adopted by a number of political science scholars (Boswell 2009: 8–11). One may even argue that achieving an enlightened civic discourse may be unattainable without expert institutions; but, even so, achieving this ideal would undoubtedly require a series of sophisticated social mechanisms. At the ground level of discourse, it requires expert communities to commit to the principles of fairness, openness, and reasonableness in democratic discourse, such as those outlined by pragma-dialecticians (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2003). At the institutional level, mechanisms are needed to properly connect scientific ‘voices’ to democratic discussions, such as those pertaining to scientific and political authorization, institutional accountability of knowledge claims, semiotic translation, and power balancing (Habermas 1996 [1992]; Brown 2009).

In the absence of these systems, so-called experts’ practical contribution to public political discourse can also be problematic, and they have been problematic. In addition to instituting or routinizing a language of euphemism and indirection, experts and professionals have played key roles in legitimating ideological argumentation in favor of war and weapons development (Kuklick 2006). For example, scientific and political communities justified the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by a cost-and-benefit discourse about how many lives would have been saved by ending the war early (Gusterson 2004). The Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine, formulated in both the academic and defense establishments, was used to justify the necessity of the nuclear arms race (Chilton 1985; Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly 1990). The rhetorical construction of the Communist threat was used to justify “containment” strategies that influenced dozens of military operations in Latin America, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Nathanson 1988).

More recently, British scientists use alternative reasoning systems concerning the development of biological weapons. They minimize the difference between killing via biological weapons and non-biological weapons and articulate a new rationale that favors the development of biological weapons (Balmer 2002). One idea that pervades in U.S. foreign policy is the doctrine of “counterinsurgency” (COIN), as inscribed in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2006).³ This doctrine, which has roots dating back in U.S. foreign policy on the ‘Third World’ in the post-WWII context (Doty 1993), has justified U.S. extended military involvement and occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq by claiming that the United States can eventually defeat the insurgent forces and win over the hearts and minds of the local populations by instituting a variety of long-term, in-depth cooptation strategies (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009).

The Qualifications of Political Experts and the Rise of Scientized Politics

Gramsci observes that “intellectuals” in every society serve special functions in maintaining and shaping the social order. He distinguishes between “traditional” and “organic” intellectuals. “Traditional intellectuals” are, at least by appearance, independent actors or professionals who relate to different social classes autonomously and serve no particular classes – such as clerics and scientists. “Organic intellectuals”, by contrast, are functionaries of particular social classes or

³ See *FM 3-24 and MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/repository/FM_3-24.pdf (accessed 13 March 2015).

groups; they primarily function to articulate ideas that serve the interests of the entities out of which they “organically” grow (Gramsci 2003 [1971]: 5–23). Occasionally intersecting, both types of intellectuals serve the functions of state domination and social hegemony by upholding or shaping the superstructure in society. Educational institutions are often organized in a way to produce intellectuals who serve such social functions.

It might have been easier to distinguish between impartial experts and partisan professionals in modern politics previously. In the contemporary social context, however, the distinction is blurred, especially when traditional institutional boundaries have been routinely breached or obfuscated (Best and Kellner 1997; Miyoshi 2010; Boswell 2009: 23–25). The cadre of experts that has appeared in the U.S. political sphere typically accrues authoritative status via two major routes: academia and governmental departments and agencies. The former route usually entails academic training and credentials (e.g., doctorates, professorships, and fellowships) in the social, natural, interdisciplinary, and applied sciences. Political science and international relations are perhaps the most common production sites for academically oriented foreign-policy experts; occasionally, experts are affiliated with interdisciplinary programs (e.g., security studies, military studies) located in different types of higher education institutions. The latter route entails years of service and experience in government departments or agencies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Department of State, and Department of Defense. ‘Experts’ appointed to serve on important commissions are individuals who either have achieved high-ranking positions in the organizations and/or have accumulated a record of relevant experience, honors, and awards; in addition, many of them have direct access to confidential data that are not available to typical academics. Therefore, these individuals are believed to possess special expertise and knowledge to assess certain issues and to do so in secret⁴ (Gusterson 2004).

There are significant crossovers and bridges between the two routes. Figures like David Kay and Charles A. Duelfer are reported to be legitimate authorities on weapons inspection and verification because of their years of involvement in former, major operations of weapons inspection. David Kay earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs and later became professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the late 1960s. With opportunities offered by State Department officials, Kay gradually became involved in applied research and assessment projects at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 1991, he was asked by Hans Blix (who headed IAEA at the time) to serve as U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991–1992. Before being appointed by George W. Bush as director of the ISG in 2003, Kay had worked in the private sector for about nine years as Senior Vice President for the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), a private contractor specialized in weapons and technological development for the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Intelligence Community.⁵ Charles A. Duelfer did not begin as a career academic. Duelfer developed a career primarily through his 25 years of work in the U.S. government’s national security agencies associated with the White House and Department of State; according to his website, “he was involved in policy development, operations, and intelligence in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, and Asia,” in addition to working on nuclear weapons and space

⁴ For examples of selection processes, see Woodward (2004, 2006, 2008).

⁵ See: David A. Kay. America’s Weapons Sleuth Talks about His Experiences Searching for Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction. *Chemical and Engineering News*, 2 August 2004, <http://pubs.acs.org/cen/coverstory/8231/8231kay.html> (accessed 12 November 2014).

programs.⁶ Duelfer worked as deputy executive chairman of the U.N. weapons inspection agency – or United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) – in Iraq from 1993–2000, overseeing UNSCOM’s chief weapons inspector Scott Ritter at the time. Prior to heading the ISG in 2004, Duelfer held visiting scholar positions at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, both located in Washington, D.C.

Experts involved in intelligence units, elite policy-making circles, ‘defense establishment’, ‘military intelligentsia’, and various government departments are not necessarily value-free. However, these experts share in common a highly impersonal language they employ and the extensive information this specialized language conjures up. They advance “scientized politics” (Brown 2009: 19). Yet, their work – particularly as it pertains to matters related to defense and security – is unlike a typical scientific enterprise in terms of confidentiality and secrecy, organizational autonomy, and epistemic conventions. These well-credentialed experts primarily engage in knowledge- and language-construction activities. Their actions help give rational-legal authority to ideological-political decisions. Building on these conceptions, our study seeks to unveil some of the pertinent practices relevant to factual construction. The practices surrounding weapons search, verification, documentation, and write-up are particularly interesting since they show how seemingly technical activities can be artfully accomplished with the effect of justifying a war, even retrospectively. In other words, they are able to move from assembling factual information to organizing evidence and ultimately to supporting political knowledge claims.

Research Approach and Methods

The data corpus consists of the following sources, including: (1) all public statements and congressional testimonies, reports, and image-based materials by ISG spokespersons – David Kay and Charles Duelfer – on the ground search effort in Iraq between 1 May 2003, when President Bush declared that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended” and 2 November 2004, when President Bush was re-elected as U.S. President; (2) the final, 900-page comprehensive report released by the ISG on Iraq’s WMD in September 2004; (3) all of President Bush’s public responses to Kay’s and Duelfer’s report in public speeches, media interviews, Presidential debates; (4) Secretary of State Collin Powell’s address to the United Nations; and (5) representations by White House spokespersons.

In this study we apply classic argumentation analysis and modeling techniques (cf. Toulmin 2003 [1958]; Van Eemeren et al. 2003) in combination with critical discourse analysis (cf. Van Dijk’s 2008, 2009, 2011) on context models, sociocultural approaches, and socio-psychological approaches (cf. Chang et al. 2013; Lueck et al. 2015). The qualitative analysis codes the arguments made by ISG spokespersons and the Bush Administration officials. We compare their argumentative claims for threat, risk, cost, and benefit. This process of argumentative grounding relies on applying a set of premises located in context models. We draw out the systematic methods by which these premises influence knowledge construction. In this sense, our approach is akin to ethnomethodological approaches (Garfinkel 1967; Lynch 1997) but also original constructionist approaches that seek to elucidate the detailed practices that enabled the construction of a social reality of threat, risk, cost, and benefit with regard to Iraq.

⁶ See “Charles Duelfer,” official website of Charles Duelfer, <http://www.charlesduelfer.com/Bio.html> (accessed 12 November 2014).

In sum, the overall goal is to analyze how experts and politicians created certified knowledge – that is, knowledge claims about *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* – that helped political leaders to justify the Coalition’s 2003 invasion of Iraq. Engaging the state’s appropriation of experts in public political discourse at detailed, argumentative level is absolutely necessary for us to understand the production of state ideology in modern political contexts.

Analysis and Discussion

Threat and Risk

The Iraq War was supported by the formation of the concepts of threat and risks and the appropriate measures to counter alternate analyses. It was fueled by worst-case scenario thinking (cf. Kaufmann 2004) and has inflated threats and risks exponentially. The possibility of the Iraqi regime possessing WMD and providing WMD capabilities to terrorists at some point in time justified the invasion of Iraq. This possibility might appear farfetched but it drew together common ties, placing them on the same side in the scene of a battle between freedom-supporting nations such as the United States and Iraq as a nation that objects to freedom and supports terrorists (Table 1).

	United States	Iraq
Freedom	Supported	Not Supported/ Objected
Possess WMD	Yes	Assumed
Terrorism	Measures against it.	Yes, supported (assumption).
Threat	No	Yes

Table 1: Characteristics of the US versus Iraq

With the premises that the Iraqi regime objected to freedom, all represented the very worst, labeling Iraq a country that possesses illegal WMD, supports terrorists, and poses a major threat. Table 1 above shows a general framework. Threat and risk do not only reside in capability: both the United States and Iraq might possess WMD. However, from the very beginning, technical verifications are only necessary to be directed toward countries that have problematic characters. Iraq was distinctly portrayed as anti-freedom and pro-terrorism by both U.S. experts and politicians, and only because of this reason is its capability even relevant. Indeed, in order to understand the more detailed argumentation about how risks and threats are calculated, one must understand how risks and threats were conceptually interwoven in an inseparable relation between character and capability. In the *2002 State of the Union Speech*, Bush labeled the Iraqi regime, along with the regimes of Iran and North Korea, as the axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world and building up “hostility toward America” (*Extract 1 sections 1*).

Extract 1

- 1 Iraq continues to **flaunt its hostility toward America** and to **support**
- 2 **terror**
- 3 This is a **regime that has something to hide from the civilized world**
(Bush 2002a).

Bush characterized the Iraqi regime as dangerous and terror-supporting (*Extract 1 sections 1–2*) primarily based on its previous use of WMD, perceived violence, and the claim that Saddam Hussein had “something to hide from the civilized world” (*Extract 1, section 3*). He further propagated the importance of removing Saddam Hussein from power, because the root of the danger resided in his character, lacking “a gentle soul” (*Extract 2, section 2*), without any consideration of the social and political contexts with regard to Iraq. This strategy aligns with the findings in previous research where these political and sociological factors were removed to reach strategic aims and public support for high risk approaches (Gusterson 1996, 2004; Vaughan, 1996).

If rationality was directed in terms of complex sociopolitical contexts, or even in terms of political realism alone, the line of argumentation for Iraq’s risks would not have been possible – or at least it would have been greatly weakened. Therefore, at the advent of the war, given ambiguous intelligence information allegedly gathered by the experts, Bush argued that

Extract 2

1 the **risk of doing nothing**, the **risk of hoping that Saddam Hussein**
 2 **changes his mind and becomes a gentle soul**, the risk that somehow inaction
 3 will make the world safer, **is a risk I’m not willing to take** for the American
 4 people
 (Bush 2003).

Expertise regarding political contexts were discarded in favor of an expertise of Saddam Hussein’s character.

In the *Comprehensive Report of the Iraq Survey Group* (Duelfer 2004), Hussein’s character was also stigmatized as a high risk for the United States and other countries. The regime was again solely represented through Saddam Hussein (i.e., “the regime was Saddam”, *Extract 3, section 1*), who was “different” (*Extract 3, section 1*), made “all calculations of risk” by himself (*Extract 3, sections 3 to 4*), and posed a major threat.

Extract 3

1 **The Regime Was Saddam – and Saddam Is Different.** The former Regime was
 2 Saddam, and **he was the one person who made important decisions.** It was his
 assessment
 3 of the utility of various policy options that was determinant. **It was Saddam’s**
 4 **calculations of risk and timing that mattered...**
 5 **Security Threats:** Internally, it was always the case that, **if Saddam perceived a**
 6 **challenge** or a **potential risk** among those around him, **he would address it early**
 and
 7 **vigorously.** Those around him feared that he would know if they even thought of
 8 something that was less than fully supportive of the Regime. Jailing, or worse, of
 those
 9 thought to be disloyal was commonplace. It was not just an urban legend that, if
 someone
 10 became too popular or too powerful, he would quickly be removed.
 11 Externally, **Saddam applied the same predilection to attack perceived threats**
 12 **preemptively. Saddam acted** against Iran **when he thought he had the advantage.**
 13 Saddam attacked Kuwait in response to perceived economic aggression by Kuwait.
 (Duelfer 2004, Volume I: 3–6.)

Extracts 2 and 3 highlight discourse strategies of personalizing the source of the problem and thereby personalizing the solutions. Accordingly, preventing attacks on the U.S. and the international community required a change of leadership and since Saddam Hussein was not likely to do so, it was highly risky not to act. Besides discursive strategies by Bush and the Iraq Survey Group (see: Duelfer 2004; Kay 2004 a, b), technical observations were used to determine Iraqi threat and risks. If the *War on Terrorism* worldview underlies every observation made by the ISG, then many ambiguous data gathered by experts (including intelligence community and professional interpreters) could be translated into potential threat. The events of terrorists crossing the Iraqi border, staying at a Baghdad hospital, or meeting with Iraqi officials at a camp in the Kurdish area could have meant multiple things. However, such information compiled by government informational units was represented by Secretary of State Colin Powell (before the United Nations) as solid evidence of the threatening collaborative ties between terrorist groups and the Hussein government. Likewise, satellite photographs of moving vehicles, ambiguous audio intercept of anonymous sources, cartoon models of mobile weapons laboratories based on a defector's account, mobile production facilities for biological agents, and Iraq's procurement of aluminum tubes – all ostensibly gathered and analyzed by experts – were ambiguous enough to have contradictory meanings and credibility. But state leaders chose to assess these observations exclusively in the light of Iraq's deceptive military strategies. Duelfer and Bush pointed to these data as significant signs of threat and signs of Iraq's deception, simply because they could plausibly indicate the existence of WMD stockpiles or weapon producing programs in Iraq. This way of representing the data legitimizes ideological argumentation in favor of war (Kuklick 2006; Nathanson 1988).

The representation of potentially innocent objects as highly threatening was also clearly exercised in the *Duelfer Report* in 2004. Over the space of about 900 pages in three volumes, the ISG report depicted that many findings might have been related to WMD programs, even though they might not. In the light of such kinds of inconclusive evidence, the ISG judged that many pre-war assertions could neither be confirmed nor rejected. These assertions include active WMD programs in Iraq after 1998 and WMD stockpiles. In doing so, they affirmed and upheld the potential existence of those weapons and programs without any concrete, positive evidence. Indeed, the *Comprehensive Report* of the ISG (Volumes I to III, 2004) was mostly built on potential risks and threats that had to be interpreted from a different cultural point of view in order to search for evidence one “may not expect or be able to see” (*Extract 4, section 9*).

Extract 4

- 1 Complicating understanding and analysis of the former Regime's WMD is the
- 2 **tendency to bring our own assumptions and logic to the examination of the evidence.**
- 3 **Western thought is filled with assumptions.** Like the operating system of our computers,
- 4 we have logic and **assumptions that are virtually built in.** We have been applying them
- 5 successfully so long in our own frame of reference that we forget they are present and
- 6 shape our thinking and conclusions. **When considering the very different system that**
- 7 **existed under the government of Saddam Hussein, there is a risk of not seeing the**

- 8 **meaning and not seeing the implications of the evidence. Analysts were asked to look**
 9 **for something they may not expect or be able to see.** A challenge like that faced by
 10 scientists engaged in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. **They have to consider**
 11 **what evidence they might see that they could not recognize.**
 (Duelfer 2004, Volume I: 2)

Extract 4 represents how a spokesperson of an expert institution legitimates interpretive mistakes. A scientized discourse is used to explain the mistake the institution committed. The investigative effort was represented as impartial and standard, as partly evident in the metaphor of computers' operating system and the paradigm of Western thought.

The use of cultural assumptions in judgment is an established fact. Although anthropologists, sociologists, and sociolinguists have observed that human taxonomy is often not merely derived from differential properties of objects but also from cultural factors (cf. Hardin and Maffi 1997; Jameson and Alvarado 2005; Labov 2011), what is remarkable in the comparison is that such assumptions had been called out and challenged in public political discourse before the war. The assumptions were hardly the kind that is 'taken for granted' by humans to navigate everyday life; they were taken as truth by the state institution. These so-called assumptions (established as legitimate by the spokesperson in this excerpt) are then used to establish the rationale for cultural interpretative evidence of threat and makes the argument for the need to counter "the risk of not seeing the meaning and not seeing implications of the evidence" (*Extract 3, sections 7 to 8*). Such strategies were already taken during the period of the Cold War and helped the CIA initiate secret strategies for which intellectuals were working for or subsidized by the CIA (Saunders 2013).

What was conclusive in the *Duelfer Report* (2004), however, was an account of Iraq's summative capability to develop WMD if certain steps were taken. For instance, Iraq would have been able to produce mustard agents in matters of months and nerve agents in less than a year. The ISG used scientific drawings of missiles and other weapons by unknown Iraqi scientists, photos of destroyed weapons that were discovered during ground search, and possible dual use processing equipment and production sites to ground their perceptions on Iraq and the possible threat and capabilities of the Hussein regime despite the fact that many of those drawings and weapons were outdated and could be traced back at least as far as 1989.

For instance, the ISG discovered an unusable sulfur mustard chemical round near Baghdad International Airport. The condition and also the type indicated that they were left-over chemical weapon equipment from pre-1991. However, the ISG still argued that the lack of driving band indicates that the round could have been fired at any time. In addition, the historical capability of the Iraqi regime in the first Gulf War was cited, when "Iraq purchased thousands of empty 155 mm artillery rounds designed to disseminate smoke chemicals" (Duelfer 2004, Volume 3: 97–98). The ISG further recovered equipment of dual use and also found destroyed production facilities for biological weapons.

Again, the discovery of pre-1991 dual-use biological processing equipment and destroyed facilities may point to previous capabilities but capability by itself does not constitute a threat. It becomes a threat only if one adopts the premise that a country would actually apply the capability to develop weapons and use those weapons in international attacks without fear of retaliation. Throughout the reports and in all public presentations, the ISG used repetitive exposures, photos of

destroyed weapons, and visualized cartoons of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons as forms of discursive and image-based justifications for the invasion of Iraq. These strategies are supported by Gustave Le Bon's research (1986 [1985]), which shows that these approaches are the secret to successful propaganda and war strategies.

Evidence of the maturity of the pre-1991 *Iraqi Nuclear Program* was virtually re-enacted by U.S. experts. Argumentatively, it was proof of the character of the Iraqi regime, an essential element for pre-war justification and for the "assumption" used by intelligence communities to interpret data before the war. While there were no findings of WMD (i.e., David Kay even verified that WMD were not found at all and they never existed or were already destroyed after 1991), there still was a justification for the Iraq War due to possible capabilities, human capital, and intelligence of Hussein's regime (Table 2).

Findings in Iraq: Evidence	Claims of Threat and Discursive Justification of Capabilities and Threat
<p>Weapons Delivery Systems</p> <p><i>"The Iraq Survey Group (ISG) has uncovered no evidence Iraq retained Scud-variant missiles, and debriefings of Iraqi officials in addition to some documentation suggest that Iraq did not retain such missiles after 1991."</i> (9)</p> <p><i>"ISG uncovered Iraqi plans or designs for three long-range ballistic missiles with ranges from 400 to 1,000 km and for a 1,000-km-range cruise missile, although none of these systems progressed to production and only one reportedly passed the design phase."</i> (10)</p> <p>Nuclear Weapons</p> <p><i>"Iraq Survey Group (ISG) discovered further evidence of the maturity and significance of the pre-1991 Iraqi Nuclear Program but found that Iraq's ability to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program progressively decayed after that date."</i> (11)</p>	<p><i>"While other WMD programs were strictly prohibited, the UN permitted Iraq to develop and possess delivery systems provided their range did not exceed 150 km. This freedom allowed Iraq to keep its scientists and technicians employed and to keep its infrastructure and manufacturing base largely intact by pursuing programs nominally in compliance with the UN limitations. This positioned Iraq for a potential breakout capability."</i> (9)</p> <p><i>"ISG assesses that these plans demonstrate Saddam's continuing desire...for a long-range delivery capability. Given Iraq's investments in technology and infrastructure improvements, an effective procurement network, skilled scientists, and designs already on the books for longer range missiles, ISG assesses that Saddam clearly intended to reconstitute long-range delivery systems and that the systems potentially were for WMD."</i> (10)</p> <p><i>"Nevertheless, after 1991, Saddam did express his intent to retain the intellectual capital developed during the Iraqi Nuclear Program."</i> (11)</p>

<p>Chemical Weapons</p> <p><i>“While a small number of old, abandoned chemical munitions have been discovered, ISG judges that Iraq unilaterally destroyed its undeclared chemical weapons stockpile in 1991.”</i> (13)</p>	<p><i>“Iraq’s CW program was crippled by the Gulf war and the legitimate chemical industry, which suffered under sanctions, only began to recover in the mid-1990s. Subsequent changes in the management of key military and civilian organizations, followed by an influx of funding and resources, provided Iraq with the ability to reinvigorate its industrial base.”</i> (13)</p>
<p>Biological Weapons</p> <p><i>“In practical terms, with the destruction of the Al Hakam facility, Iraq abandoned its ambition to obtain advanced BW weapons quickly. ISG found no direct evidence that Iraq, after 1996, had plans for a new BW program or was conducting BW-specific work for military purposes.”</i> (17)</p>	<p><i>“Depending on its scale, Iraq could have re-established an elementary BW program within a few weeks to a few months of a decision to do so, but ISG discovered no indications that the Regime was pursuing such a course.”</i> (18)</p>

Table 2: Findings in Iraq and the discursive justification of capability and threat by the ISG (Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD, Key Findings, 2004: 9–18).

Table 2 demonstrates the construct of threat. The left column states the physical findings – often none or few objects are found – while the right column states the threat being identified. The risks and threat were determined by the ISG based on the aspired desire of the Hussein regime to develop nuclear, chemical, and biological capabilities in an incremental fashion in the near future. The *Duelfer Report* (2004) and the key findings by the ISG did provide materials about the intent and capabilities to produce WMD, which helped the Bush Administration to affirm its tactical calculation to be legitimate and to justify the overall outcome of the invasion on the ground that a major material threat was eliminated. This calculation was mediated by assumptions or imaginations about Saddam Hussein’s intentions – for example, what Hussein “could have done” with minimal materials that he “could have” produced. Hence, threat was assessed through “worst-case” scenario thinking (cf. Kaufmann 2004) in rational discourse, on one hand, and the construction of a hyper-reality (Baudrillard 1994 [1981]) based on imaginations (supposed presence of WMD in Iraq), on the other.

However, the knowledge that Saddam Hussein was probably not hiding WMD (*Extracts 5 and 6*) disturbed the legitimacy of military actions against Iraq and potentially challenged the Bush Administration’s moral integrity. Therefore, the Bush Administration employed secondary elaborations provided by experts of the ISG (see: *Duelfer Report* 2004) to make sense of the new information in public discourse, thereby reaffirming the presence of the Iraqi threat, the positive role of the United States, and the highly negative role of Saddam Hussein (*Extract 5*).

Extract 5

1 **We didn't find the stockpiles everybody thought was there. But knowing what I**
 2 **know today, I would have taken the same action.** And the reason why is because
 3 **Saddam Hussein had the capability of making weapons of mass destruction.**
 4 And had the world turned its head, he **would have made** those weapons. Had we
 5 hoped that a resolution would have worked, he **would have been able to realize**
 6 **his dreams**
 (Bush 2004a).

Extract 6

1 Chief weapons inspector, Charles **Duelfer**, has now issued a comprehensive
 2 report that **confirms the earlier conclusion of David Kay that Iraq did not have the**
 3 **weapons that our intelligence believed were there....The Duelfer report makes**
 4 **clear that much of the accumulated body of 12 years of our intelligence and**
 5 **that of our allies was wrong, and we must find out why and correct the**
 6 **flaws.** The **Silberman-Robb commission is now at work to do just that**, and its
 7 work is important and essential. At a time of many threats in the world, **the**
 8 **intelligence on which the President and members of Congress base their**
 9 **decisions must be better**—and it will be. I look forward to the Intelligence
 10 Reform Commission's recommendations, and **we will act on them to improve**
 11 **our intelligence, especially our intelligence about weapons of mass destruction.**
 12 Thank you all very much
 (Bush 2004b)

The problem of the absence of WMD and the technical failures within the *Duelfer Report* took for granted that the search outcomes could not possibly be attributed to the Bush Administration's immoral character, the intention to falsify data or problematic reasoning in order to justify an unnecessary war. Embedded in the reasoning is a sequence of reciprocal evidencing. Because the Bush Administration presented itself always with a strong commitment to finding and upholding the truth (*Extract 6*), it formed a fact-finding commission and would even evaluate failures and problems. The very act of forming a commission to investigate intelligence failure serves as an evidential fact supporting the assertion of the Administration's proactive desire for truth. However, Bush also indirectly rebutted criticisms about his ill-intention by inflating the stakes of intelligence failures with regard to the Iraq War. Because the stakes for the quality intelligence has always been so high, Bush had no motive to undermine the war that he himself proposed only to support enemies that were dangerous. Hence, his goodwill was substantiated by the stake of losing the war on Iraq. In fact, the Administration's goodwill was taken for granted as a given truth and the Administration voided the need to investigate itself. The commission the Bush Administration appointed to investigate was "not authorized to investigate how policymakers used the intelligence assessments they received from the Intelligence Community" (*The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2005: 8). Within such an epistemic limit, the failure of intelligence accuracy was not to be attributed to policymakers' abuse or misuse of the information. A report released a year later explained why intelligence had failed. The commission attributed the weakness in intelligence to the intelligence community personnel's drive to "maintain a status quo that is increasingly irrelevant to the new challenges presented by weapons of mass destruction," complacency in accepting intelligence gaps, and failure to tell policymakers "just how limited their knowledge really is" (ibid: 4). It also stated that

“Intelligence will always be imperfect and, as history persuades us, surprise [about WMD] can never be completely prevented“ (ibid: 7).

Cost and Benefit

Data show how critical concepts like *cost*, *benefit*, *threat*, *risks*, and *enemy ties* are conceived, evidenced, and calculated. Consider the notion of the Iraq pre-invasion and post-invasion calculation of cost and benefit. Foreseeable human costs of the war were significantly played down by the Bush Administration and their experts by juxtaposing them to the benefits of ‘freedom’ and ‘justice.’ Hence, U.S. soldiers, Iraqi soldiers, and civilians indeed paid a price in terms of deaths, injury, and sacrifices, but the premise that Iraqis suffering from the extreme brutality of Saddam Hussein, living in a situation that ‘could hardly get worse’, legitimated the invasion before and after the war.

Lobbying for a military budget increase in 2002, Bush repeatedly used the expression “the price of freedom”, stating that “while the price of freedom is high, it is never too high”. Examples of this strategy are provided in *Extracts 7 and 8* below:

Extract 7

1 My budget includes the largest increase in defense spending in two decades—
 2 because while **the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high.**
 3 **Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay**
 (Bush 2002b).

Extract 8

1 We believe in the dignity of every person. They can’t stand that. And the only
 2 way they know to express themselves is through killing, cold-blooded killing.
 3 And so we need to treat them the way they are, as international criminals. And
 4 that’s why my defense budget is the largest increase in 20 years. You know,
 5 **the price of freedom is high, but for me it’s never too high because we**
 6 **fight for freedom.**
 (Bush 2002c).

A primary faith was required to substantiate the notion that the proposed military project in Iraq is about protecting and spreading freedom; and the discourse provides such a basis. While it is customary to believe human freedom to be priceless, we do see economic prices being placed on freedom in other contexts. Freedom from jail or prison time, for example, may be clearly marked in definite monetary amounts in the forms of bail and fines (Abrams 2013). In the context of freedom as evoked by Bush as a spokesman of the American nation, freedom is a sacred symbol that has been transmitted for many generations. By implication in this context, then, freedom cannot be measured in economic terms; it is a cause that numerous Americans have sacrificed and died for. Translated into the context of military invasion sought by Bush, the price of freedom is indeed “never too high” (*Extract 8, section 5*). In this way, a cultural discourse is transferred into a rationalist (or rational choice) discourse (cf. Habermas 1996 [1992]).

Findings also show that there was a serious consideration of the enormous costs for the United States versus the costs for Saddam Hussein. Indeed, the ISG explicitly pointed out that Saddam

“cost the United States a lot with almost no cost to himself” (*Extract 9, section 5*), indicating the burden Saddam Hussein was causing for the United States:

Extract 9

1 Saddam conducted his confrontation with the United States on many fronts. The main
 2 military front was the no-fly zone skirmishes. It must be said that, as much as Saddam
 3 hated the intrusion over his airspace of American and British patrols (and, it may be
 4 recalled, with the French initially participating as well), this was a battle he was
 5 fighting with a very favorable exchange ratio. **He cost the United States a lot with**
 6 **almost no cost to himself, and he could readily sustain the battle indefinitely.**
 7 Again, this was a typically shrewd method of exercising leverage
 (Duelfer 2004, Volume I: 5).

The juxtaposition of human and economic costs with immeasurable moral and economic benefits is also evident in post-invasion rhetoric. Bush repeatedly referenced “mass graves” and the fall of Saddam’s statue when he sought to argue in his re-election campaign about the worthiness of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He seemed to personally believe in the idea when he met Iraqis who expressed their thanks, allegedly breaking down in tears when learning that an Iraqi woman addressed him as “Liberator” (“Muharrir” in Arabic) upon entering the White House’s Oval Office in November 2003 (Woodward 2006: 270).

Justification in favor of the Iraq War and a positive cost-benefit presentation were also made in the light of well-grounded critique. Responding to the release of a widely publicized book, *The Three Trillion Dollar War* (2008), coauthored by Harvard professor Linda Bilmes and Nobel Laureate in economics Joseph Stiglitz, which estimated the true cost of the U.S. war on Iraq to be at least three trillion if it was to end swiftly, White House spokesperson Tony Fratto reportedly stated:

Extract 10

1 People like Joe Stiglitz lack the courage to consider **the cost of doing**
 2 **nothing and the cost of failure. One can’t even begin to put a price tag on**
 3 **the cost to this nation...**It is also an investment
 4 in the **future safety and security** of Americans and our vital national
 5 interests. **\$3 trillion? What price does Joe Stiglitz put on attacks on**
 6 **the homeland that have already been prevented?** Or doesn’t his slide
 7 rule work that way?
 (Froomkin 2008)

What is most remarkable in *Extract 10* is not the fact that Fratto disputed the methods of calculation, but the manner by which assumptions associated with the Iraq War and the overall War on Terrorism grounded his counterargument. The seemingly astronomical financial figure was seen to weigh against “the cost of doing nothing” (*Extract 10, sections 1–2*) against terrorism and “the cost of failure” (*Extract 10, section 2*) in the face of terrorism, and it is weighed with the benefit of “future safety and security” and the attacks against the United States that have already been prevented. These costs and benefits were financial costs, but they are based on imagined scenarios (cf. Baudrillard 1994 [1981]) that terrorists would attack the United States, that the Iraq War has already prevented but not provoked attacks on the homeland, as well as the presumption that the

enemies could not be deterred by non-military means. Based on Fratto's calculation scheme, "one can't even begin to put a price tag" on the War on Terrorism, which follows the benefit already purchased via the Iraq War. Therefore, the worthiness of spending \$3 trillion is justified as a matter of course.

After the controversial resignation and statements by former ISG head, David Kay, who provided evidence that WMD did not exist in Iraq (See: Kay 2004a, b), the Bush Administration was also beginning to publicly address the possibility that Iraq did not possess WMD. President Bush did so by emphasizing the negative evaluations about Iraq in Kay's report, citing Iraq's unauthorized materials and activities, its illegal use of the Oil-for-Food program, and Kay's overall assessment that the Iraqi regime was a threat and danger to the world. Its basic representational strategy can be seen in his practices of cost-benefit analyses and public threat accounting.

Both Bush (2004a, 2004b) and Duelfer (2004) further established the rationale that Saddam Hussein recognized that the reconstitution of Iraqi WMD enhanced both his security and power. Consequently, they predicted that Saddam wanted to end U.N. sanctions and further engage in illegal oil sales to reach his military and economic goals.

Bush also argued that although the pre-war calculation process was slightly incorrect due to mistakes by his intelligence, the assertion of Iraqi threat has been verified to be correct; and the overall outcomes of the war were mostly positive. His statements on *Meet the Press (Extract 11)*, hosted by Tim Russert, following the David Kay resignation is particularly revealing of Bush's reasoning framework.

Extract 11

- 1 HOST: Now looking back, in your mind, is it worth the loss of **530**
 - 2 **American lives and 3,000 injuries and woundings** simply to remove
 - 3 Saddam Hussein, even though there were no weapons of mass destruction?
 - 4 PRESIDENT BUSH: **Every life is precious.** Every person that is willing to
 - 5 sacrifice for this country deserves our praise, and yes.
 - 6 HOST: Do you think—
 - 7 PRESIDENT BUSH: **Let me finish.**
 - 8 HOST: Please.
 - 9 PRESIDENT BUSH: It's essential that I explain this properly to the parents of
 - 10 those who lost their lives. **Saddam Hussein was dangerous, and I'm not gonna**
 - 11 **leave him in power and trust a madman. He's a dangerous man.** He had **the**
 - 12 **ability to make weapons at the very minimum.** For the parents of the soldiers
 - 13 who have fallen who are listening, David **Kay**, the weapons inspector, came back
 - 14 and said, "**In many ways Iraq was more dangerous than we thought.**" It's—we're
 - 15 in a war against **these terrorists who will bring great harm to America,** and I've
 - 16 asked these young ones to sacrifice for that. A free Iraq will change the world. It's
 - 17 **historic times. A free Iraq will make it easier for other children** in our own
 - 18 country **to grow up in a safer world because in the Middle East is where you find**
 - 19 **the hatred and violence that enables the enemy to recruit its killers.**
- (Bush 2004c)

Relying on David Kay's public statement about the Iraqi threat – that Iraq was more dangerous than he had thought before the war (*Extract 11, section 14*) – Bush argued that the soldiers had eliminated a "great harm" to the United States for years to come, regardless of whether Iraq

actually possessed WMD (*Extract 11, section 15*). This information is then used in his cost-benefit analysis, substantiating the argument that the removal of Saddam Hussein (benefit) was worth the injuries and loss of American lives (cost), within the context of Iraq not having any WMD. But Bush was not merely arguing for the material benefits that satisfy the nation's self-interest. At a higher level, Bush also made use of the Iraq War to make a symbolic calculation arguing for the moral benefit of the war in light of human costs (*Extract 12*). Weighing between the precious but finite human costs (i.e., the represented costs) in exchange for what he shortly referred to as fulfilling 'history's call to America' (i.e., the represented benefit, *Extract 12, sections 7 and 8*), Bush inferred that the overall benefit was worth the cost. As Bush immediately continued after this quote:

Extract 12

1 And, Tim, as you can tell, I've got a **foreign policy that is one that believes**
 2 **America has a responsibility in this world to lead, a responsibility to lead in the**
 3 **war against terror, a responsibility to speak clearly about the threats** that we all
 4 face, a responsibility to promote freedom, to free people from the clutches of
 5 barbaric people such as **Saddam Hussein who tortured, mutilated – there were**
 6 **mass**
 7 **graves that we have found**—a responsibility to **fight AIDS**, the pandemic of AIDS,
 8 and to **feed the hungry**. We have a responsibility. To me that is **history's call to**
 9 **America. I accept the call and will continue to lead in that direction**
 (Bush 2004c).

Not only did Bush argue that the benefit of the war was worth the cost of soldiers' lives but he also concluded that his motivation to invade Iraq was morally justified and correct. The motivation is primarily established by facts that indicate the negative role of Iraq and the highly positive role of the United States (*Extract 12*). Bush saw himself and altruistic U.S. soldiers on the side of the good serving lofty moral purposes from the very beginning. He also presented Saddam Hussein as highly problematic and claimed that the ISG investigation confirmed, not rejected, this knowledge. The "mass graves" (*Extract 12, sections 5–6*) were elicited again as an evidential fact to confirm the evilness of Saddam Hussein and of his regime.

The Bush Administration further used information from ISG investigators to figure into the symbolic calculation of the worthiness of the invasion of Iraq. This is a form of moral discourse that exhibit moral-practical rationality, borrowing from Habermas' typologies of rationality (1984 [1981]: 23). Under the moral-rational calculation scheme, the measurement of the outcome is the amount of goodness done relative to the evilness eliminated; the measurement of motivation is the amount of goodness intended relative to the evilness intended. A simple discovery – the finding of mass graves (although these graves had already been discovered by U.N. inspectors in the 1990s) – served as an evidential fact to justify both the means and the ends. The Duelfer report's extensive overview of Saddam Hussein's dirty deeds and unclean intentions further provided an extensive reservoir of materials provided by experts to the Bush Administration to engage in a persuasive cost-benefit analysis and to justify the Iraq War in the absence of threat and WMD.

Conclusions

By studying the discourse utilized by the ISG and politicians of the Bush Administration, we show the methods by which appointed experts helped to affirm the existence of Iraqi threat even in the absence of physical evidence for WMD stockpiles or active weapons programs found in Iraq during U.S. ground search. Furthermore, the goal was to analyze how these experts and U.S. politicians created certified knowledge – that is, knowledge claims about *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* – that helped political leaders to justify the invasion of Iraq.

The detailed arguments presented in this study are wide-ranging: they revolve around whether the enemy is threatening, whether a political or military action is right or wrong, whether the judgment error is legitimate, whether economic sacrifice is too high, and whether human cost is worth the benefit. For each of the subtopics under debate, the U.S. government skillfully constructs rationalist justification to defend its judgment, employing the authority and information of experts as valuable resources. For both experts and the Bush Administration on the political stage, discrediting U.N. investigative reports by Hans Blix required persuasive works from graphic reports of Colin Powell prior to the invasion of Iraq (including the use of cartoon models) to representing the 900-page *Duelfer Report* (2004) after the invasion to justify the Iraq War retroactively despite the absence of WMD. These works pertained to the uses of delegated social authority and resources to delineate boundaries of social membership, meanings of their social behaviors, and implications for collective actions. Such processes pertaining to defining facts and events in Iraq helped to legitimate the use of force by the Bush Administration. The research by Murray Edelman (1971, 1988) should be noted here because “government affects behavior chiefly by shaping the cognitions of large numbers of people in ambiguous situations. It helps create their beliefs about what is proper; their perceptions of what is fact; and their expectations of what it is to come” (Edelman 1971: 7). The new mode of discursive manipulation based on experts seems to exhibit some common characteristics. By gathering a vast amount of data, technical experts give visionary political leaders the raw materials to (a) construe the image or character of the enemy from a cultural construct into a much more “objective fact” and to (b) link disconnected facts into patterns, which they can then use to assert strong theoretical probabilities about threat, risk, cost, and benefits of the Iraq War. Furthermore, institutional spokespersons lend expert authority to political actors, and such authority is important in countering public or professional criticisms. Moreover, state actors can evade a large part of responsibility when a well-credentialed spokesperson admits a personal or collective error of judgment, especially when he or she publicly defends political actors.

We do not doubt that the extensiveness of information enabled by scientized politics can become a precondition for legitimate knowledge and truth claims (Schudson 2006; Brown 2009). But this study shows just how easy it is for political leaders in power to advocate for radical foreign and economic policies on scientific grounds. It only takes a relatively small number of experts with privileged access to gather and process documents to produce a subset of usable, putatively authoritative knowledge to support a wide variety of rationalist claims. Without the presence of ethical discourse guidelines, open informational access, organizational independence and diversity, and political accountability mechanisms – what Habermas (1996 [1992]) calls “communicative

rationality” and the necessary institutions enabling it⁷ – what we are witnessing is just a form of “politics of representation” (Shapiro 1988; Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly 1990) enhanced by a scientific flavor, whereby enlightening potentials of scientific discourse are compromised by its deceptive functions.

This study is a demonstration of how knowledge that could seem highly arbitrary was solidified through elaborate discourse practices in U.S. politics and corresponding political strategies against Iraq. Elaborateness in epistemic practices is important (Knorr-Cetina 1999), because events do not speak for themselves, and alternative meanings are always asserted by powerful discourse players in public (Erickson 2004; Habermas 1996 [1992]). As a result, skillful interpretive and representational practices help to sustain the coherence of meaning systems by indicating how they connect to novel events, contradictory data, and recommended actions (Pollner 1987). Following rigorous procedures to do so lessens the impression of arbitrariness. The analysis shows, however, that epistemic elaborateness and coherence do not necessarily correspond with the truthfulness or even advancement of knowledge. In fact, a paradox seems to have surfaced: while the elaborateness of political knowledge is key to its coherence, it is also the key to its fragility and weakness. Indeed, the elaborateness of reasoning and the coherence of epistemic results may positively correspond with the production of faulty knowledge in order to reach certain military goals, secure economic benefits, and justify the invasion of Iraq. The more elaborate the reasoning process is, the more systemic epistemic procedures are followed, the more coherent and intelligible phenomena become, the more the faulty knowledge seems to be legitimate.

Examining the politics of representation of knowledge claims of *threat*, *risk*, *cost*, and *benefit* has brought to light the presence of plausible alternative meanings at every discourse stage of the war on Iraq. Those plausible alternatives were dismissed and explained away precisely through such diverse practices as cost-benefit analysis, threat and risk calculation, labor-intensive investigation, skillful data observation, and persuasive narratives that were applied to diverse events, objects, and people to justify the Iraq War. Given such conditions, the facts within an otherwise intricate system no longer have their original meaning. Jean Baudrillard’s provocative theorization of war as a “hyperreality” and “simulacra” (1994 [1981]: 1–4, provides an important tool for us to understand this issue. Accordingly, the political representation by experts such as David Kay and Charles Duelfer and the use or misuse of expert knowledge by the Bush Administration constitute a (hyper) reality of its own that has far greater worldly consequences than what ‘real’ truths might originally be (Baudrillard 1994 [1981]). It blatantly presumes a condition in which fiction (i.e., WMD in Iraq) and reality (i.e., no WMD in Iraq) have been rendered undistinguishable. Representation, then, does not have to be ‘referentially correct’ in order to have constitutive power. As long as ‘truth’ is made to appear correct, it would direct and mediate social forces in ways that are somewhat real. Combining Durkheim (1995 [1912]) and Baudrillard (1994 [1981]), we can characterize this way of stabilizing global relations to be the construction of an international political culture based on simulated moral solidarity among political actors. Such simulated moral solidarity, constituted by simulated social facts as established by experts and the Bush Administration through simulated threat and risks as well as simulated costs and benefit, creates simulated social forces that regulate ‘real’ relations.

⁷ For a review of exemplary institutional efforts to democratize expert discourse, as well as their accomplishments and ongoing challenges, see Brown (2009) and Lövbrand, Pielke, and Beck (2011).

Showing the richness and versatility of the Iraq War knowledge system, this analysis speaks to the larger issue of the practical formation of political ideology for war by calling attention to the powerful uses of cultural premises in political reasoning and the incredibly elaborate discursive and evidential mechanisms sustaining those premises. It makes a case for sociological researchers to move beyond interrogating thematic and contextual meanings espoused by public political actors into dissecting situated discursive and epistemic practices upholding those meanings.

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