

BAD ANALOGICAL REASONING AND POST-WAR OPERATIONS IN IRAQ AFTER 2003

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The past is an enormous grab bag with a prize for everybody.
Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., 1974.

Stanley Hoffmann has suggested that the use of historical analogies by U.S. foreign policy-makers is part and parcel of the American national style (Hoffmann, 1968). Similarly, Yuen Foong Khong notes that heads of state have always “turned to the past in dealing with the present” (Khong, 1992: 3). While some observers believe that historical analogies “are mostly utilized merely as post-hoc justifications for policy choices determined by ideology and partisanship and are therefore not independent variables in the policy process” (Taylor and Rourke, 1995: 460), others argue that they do exert a significant influence and perform specific functions within the decision-making process, particularly during the option selection and evaluation phase (Vertzberger, 1986; Khong, 1992). Among other things, they provide guideposts for interpreting new situations (Hemmer, 2000: 5) and keys to understanding the cognitive processes of decision-makers (Houghton, 1996: 549), helping them find solutions more quickly in urgent, politically murky circumstances (Hemmer, 2000: 2).

U.S. foreign policy has been marked by two momentous events (Gilovich, 1981: 802) – Munich and the Vietnam War – but it would appear that only the Second World War was used as a frame of reference for the intervention in Iraq that began in 2003 (Welch Larson, 2010: 318). More specifically, studies have shown that the planning and implementation of Iraqi reconstruction after 2003 was informed by the analogy with German reconstruction (Hoogland Noon, 2004; Houghton, 2008; Locas, 2008; David, 2010; Angstrom, 2011; MacDonald, 2012), a finding that is confirmed by the memoirs of the main architects of the war in Iraq. Those studies have arrived at broadly similar conclusions. First, the choice of the German analogy as a guide to decision-making “paralyze[d] the debate about Iraq rather than clarifying it” (Fallows, 2006: 3) and was therefore partly responsible for the mistakes made and the problems encountered on the ground by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which administered Iraq until the transfer of power to the Iraqis. In particular, the de-Baathification programs and the dissolution of the Iraqi army were modelled directly on post-war Germany. Secondly, the German analogy, which was cited in many public comments by the policy-makers

throughout the run-up to the war in Iraq, from the weeks following 9/11 up to the invasion, was invoked to justify a decision that had already been made.

These analyses are certainly not wrong but they are incomplete. Why is it that out of all the possible analogies, the one with Germany proved most compelling and influential? By what cognitive mechanisms was this choice arrived at? We believe that cognitive predispositions account for the use of one *particular* analogy rather than another. In other words, in the competition between analogic points of reference, the choice of one over the others depends on the mindset of the decision-makers more than it does on its political usefulness. Overall, the choice of an historical analogy to evaluate new foreign policy situations is determined primarily by three criteria:

- (1) the analogy's *proximity in time* and its resemblance to the current situation (Maoz, 1990; Brändström et al., 2004: 208), which can lead decision-makers to believe that the cause-effect relationship applies in the same way in both cases and that the analogy would be a useful guide to action;
- (2) the policy-makers' *personal and historical experience* (Jervis, 1968: 468; Hemmer, 2000: 15; Mintz and DeRouen, 2010: 105), or what some commentators have called the "generation effect," meaning events that have left their mark on a generation and created a "repertoire of analogies" (Khong, 1992: 33; Schuman and Rieger, 1992; Kornprobst, 2007: 40); on this view, the decision-makers' backgrounds and learned responses are decisive dimensions of their use of analogies;
- (3) the *prescriptive power* of the analogous event, which allows the decision-makers to extract from it ideas or actions that are applicable to the current situation (Inboden, 2014: 298): if the objectives were achieved in the apparently analogous past case and the methods used proved successful, the same is expected to hold true in the present.

On the basis of these criteria, the policy-makers in the George W. Bush administration¹ might have been expected to prefer analogies that were more recent, more relevant and closer to their own experiences, such as the Vietnam War (a generational event), the Gulf War (an event that was part of their professional experience, many members of the administration having participated in the planning for the military intervention in 1991), or even the Balkan wars (given their proximity in time). But the choice of German

¹ This group included the following people: President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, CIA Director George Tenet, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance chief Jay Garner, and Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq.

reconstruction as an analogy for the rebuilding of Iraq is consistent with the “prescriptive power” criterion, suggesting it was dictated more by cognitive factors than by political calculation. This is why other analogies, which may have been more appropriate to the Iraqi situation, were brushed aside. As Christopher Hemmer notes,

While policy makers are constrained by their beliefs, they are also capable of deliberately selecting a specific analogy based on explicit judgments regarding which potential historical parallel holds the information that is most useful to them [...], this analogical freedom of choice does not mean that the selection process is a purely instrumental one where policy makers already know what policy they want to implement and then decide what analogy will be most effective in selling that policy (Hemmer, 2000: 14).

In short, presidents and their advisors “*employed* analogies to inform their decision making and *deployed* them to mobilize public support for decisions made or about to be made” (Record, 2002: 3). We believe that the use of the German analogy to plan the reconstruction of Iraq was not simply a calculated ploy aimed at justifying political and military decisions to the public. Thorough analysis of the literature and particularly of the memos, meeting notes and memoirs of the people involved in Iraqi rebuilding shows how the members of the G. W. Bush administration bought into the German analogy in assessing the situation in Iraq and searching for solutions to the problems encountered on the ground, despite other available analogies and the difficulties to which application of the German model gave rise. Although the German analogy was problematic, given the significant differences between the situation in Germany in 1945 (which was embedded in the broader context of the Second World War) and the situation in Iraq in 2003 (and the wider context of the fight against terrorism), it was in fact a logical cognitive reference point if we consider the following factors:

- (1) the German analogy harks back to World War II, a point of reference close to the hearts of Bush and the neoconservatives in his decision-making team;
- (2) being a war of choice, Iraq demanded positive, victorious historical analogies in order to muster broad public support at home, and examples of successful nation-building are not legion;
- (3) the German analogy was a good fit with standard operating procedures;
- (4) the other available analogies contributed little to forming the Bush administration’s perceptions of and actions in Iraq; rather, they reinforced, directly or indirectly, the analogy with German reconstruction.

Starting from these four points, we will attempt to articulate possible answers to the questions we have raised: namely, why the policy-makers in the Bush administration relied on the German analogy rather than others as a model for rebuilding Iraq,² and whether this choice was instrumental (a political calculation) or rather experiential (rooted in their cognitive influences), given the decision-makers' backgrounds, the political and military context, and American decision-making culture.

World War II as a cognitive frame of reference for the neocons

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Bush was quick to compare the event with the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. In almost every speech, he repeated that the U.S. had to fight “the same evil that has spurred his father’s generation to stand up to Hitler” (MacDonald, 2012: 38). On September 11, 2001, he wrote in his journal, “the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century took place today” (Woodward, 2002: 37). His top advisors – Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz – took the same tack. References to the Second World War proliferated in their speeches and interviews (Welch Larson, 2003: 318; Hoogland Noon, 2004: 352; Angstrom, 2011: 230; Struye de Swielande, 2013: 431), creating the cognitive framework within which the upcoming decisions would be considered. Rice commented that the 9/11 attacks “were no less consequential in our thinking than the attack on Pearl Harbor had been for U.S. policy makers in December 1941” (Rice, 2011: 148). It should also be noted that “President Bush seems to have employed several cognitive rhetorical strategies for maintaining his belief system in the face of dissonant information” (Walker et al., 2011: 178) by, for example, clinging to the analogy “that confirms the wisdom of his decisions” (Sanger, 2005; Walker et al., 2011: 178). That tendency would make it still more difficult to question the choice of the German analogy during the following months.

The importance of the analogy with the Second World War for defining the events of 9/11, the military intervention in Iraq in 2003, and more broadly the war on terror, has been extensively documented. However, we need to go further back in time to understand the degree to which the “good war” shaped the ideals of Bush, Cheney³ and Rumsfeld, as well as Wolfowitz and Feith (Tenet, 2007: 422; Houghton, 2008: 181). In fact, “in

² For example, some predicted that the liberation of Iraq would play out much like the liberation of France. Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, drew the parallel in a report quoted by Bradley Graham (2009: 351-352). This may well have been the original inspiration for the comments by Cheney and Wolfowitz predicting that the Americans would be greeted as liberators by the Iraqis (Graham, 2009: 385). Others compared the liberation of Iraq with the liberation of Eastern Europe, first from Nazism and then from Communism (Weisberg, 2008: 205). On the other hand, many analysts, academics, military men and former ambassadors argued that the invasion of Iraq would turn into a quagmire for the Bush administration and that a better analogy than Germany might be Vietnam, or perhaps the British experience in Iraq in the 1920s, which was as ill-fated as the U.S. invasion proved to be. Those warnings were not heeded by the decision-makers. We will return to these other analogies below.

³ The vice president explored this analogy at length in his speeches and interviews. In his case, it was primarily instrumental.

seeking and acquiring national office, George W. Bush has consistently referenced World War II not simply to justify his own policy aims, but more importantly as a cultural project as well as an ongoing gesture of self-making” (Hoogland Noon, 2004: 340). Since World War II figured prominently in Bush’s belief system and that of most of his senior advisors (Walker et al., 2011: 169-188), it is not surprising that it should have served as a frame of reference for the military intervention in Iraq in 2003 and for the subsequent rebuilding effort. This may be seen as an instance of the generation effect. According to David Patrick Houghton, decision-makers’ belief systems predispose them to use specific analogies (Houghton, 1996: 549). In the case of the G. W. Bush administration, a belief system rooted in the Second World War led the president and his top officials to apply, in post-Saddam Iraq, solutions comparable to those adopted for the post-war rebuilding of Germany and Japan. Their references to these analogies would therefore appear to stem more from cognitive learning than from political calculation.

In this connection, it must be borne in mind that World War II was an iconic event for American neoconservatives, who occupied a central position in the George W. Bush administration: “First and second-hand experiences of Nazi horror, juxtaposed with positive experience in America, have colored neoconservative accounts of the world” (MacDonald, 2009: 68). While historical analogies are often used by decision-makers “to define their own identity and the identity of their nation” (Inboden, 2014: 298), the neocons were able to avail themselves of references to the Second World War to convince Americans of the need for a tough, focused, unflagging response to the evil of terrorism, particularly since “many neoconservatives knew far better about the Soviet bloc and European totalitarianism than about the Middle East” (Lind, 2012; 119). So it is that analogies drawn from the experience of World War II “have played a salient role in neoconservative policy advocacy, and Bush administration policy-making” (MacDonald, 2012: 38). They served to defend, in the media and also to hesitant advisors, the proposition that “the United States was facing a Hitlerian threat requiring a Churchillian response” (Record, 2007: 168).

Given the sway of the neoconservative world view within the Bush administration, the choice of World War II-related analogies appears altogether logical. The comparison was also reinforced by well-known figures such as Eli Wiesel, who “told Bush that if the Allies had intervened in 1938, World War II and the Holocaust could have been avoided” (Fleischer, 2005: 316). It was therefore natural enough that Iraqi reconstruction should take its cue from the triumphant model of German reconstruction, particularly since the Second World War was the event that established America’s world leadership and enabled it to present itself as the defender of freedom and democracy around the world. In the neoconservative vision, the post-2001 period, and especially the Iraq war and reconstruction, were to serve the same function.

Few examples of successful nation-building

All the wars waged by the U.S. since the Second World War have been wars of choice (Record, 2002: 1), including the war in Iraq in 2003. However, “the fact that [Bush] had freedom of maneuver generated additional psychological pressures on him to believe that there were multiple reasons for him to act and that he actually had little choice” (Jervis, 2012: 30). The perceived lack of choice, in the eyes of the president and his advisors, had two direct consequences when it comes to the analogies they subsequently picked to guide Iraqi reconstruction. First, it meant they needed to reach for an analogy that would be widely understood and accepted by the public and by political actors (Breuning, 2003: 231); secondly, they also needed an analogy “that provided a reassuring conclusion: victory” (Jespersen, 2005: 413).

At the same time, the policy-makers in the Bush administration had few examples of nation-building – and even fewer of successful nation-building – at hand to call upon. Aside from Germany and Japan, there were the more recent cases of Kosovo and Afghanistan, but they did not appear to White House officials as compelling examples that should be applied to Iraq. In fact, members of the Bush administration frequently cited those two cases to support their choice of the German analogy. For example, Rumsfeld referred to “U.S. involvement in the Balkans as a model of how postwar policy could go wrong, specifically by breeding dependency on the U.S. and creating opportunities for moral hazard” (Rapport, 2013: 159; Rumsfeld, 2003). The notes and memos written by Rumsfeld in 2002 and 2003 indicate that he did not regard Afghanistan as a model either: “He was unsatisfied with post invasion progress in Afghanistan, and it seemed that prewar debates about Iraq informed his thinking about involvement in Afghanistan rather than vice versa” (Rapport, 2013: 159; Rumsfeld, 2002).

The Secretary of Defense was not alone in rejecting analogies with the Balkans and Afghanistan. In her memoirs, Condoleezza Rice recalled that the administration had two options for Iraqi reconstruction, both unsatisfactory:

The first was to let the United Nations and its various agencies lead the effort. But the President had been to Kosovo in 2001 and been appalled by the lethargic UN presence more than two years after the war had ended [...] The second alternative [...] would be to follow the model of the postwar effort in Afghanistan. There we had used an ‘adopt a ministry’ plan, with Allied governments taking responsibility for various functions: the German had the police, the Italians had the Justice Ministry, and we had the army,

and so on. That was already breeding conflict and incoherence, and no one wanted to repeat that approach (Rice, 2011: 191).

For the decision-makers, the most attractive guide to the rebuilding of Iraq was the case of Germany, which along with Japan was the only positive example of nation-building available to them. For example, George W. Bush referenced the Japanese success story in his memoirs, noting that “by adopting a Japanese-style democracy, an enemy become an ally” (Bush, 2010: 397). The memoirs of Paul Bremer, the administrator of post-Saddam Iraq, also afford some insight into how he perceived the rebuilding of the country, and particularly his role in it. Bremer saw himself as “the MacArthur of Baghdad” (Bremer, 2006: 36). He wanted to make Iraq “a success story [...] that, like Germany and Japan, still looked good after 50 years” (Bremer, 2006: 204, in a conversation with Colin Powell dated 21 October 2003). Similarly, Douglas Feith argued that the “United States had much to gain from democratic political reform in the Muslim world, just as we had gained a great deal from such reform in Germany and Japan” (Feith, 2008: 236). The German analogy also crops up in the National Security Advisor’s memoirs, where it is used to justify both the intervention in Iraq and the lack of post-war planning: “Our overall response to 9/11 was in one sense similar to the U.S. response to Pearl Harbor and its experience after World War II. When the war was over, the Europeans, particularly Great Britain, cared less about the form of the new German government than about containing its power” (Rice, 2011: 325).

Natural fit with standard operating procedures (SOP) from 1945

Another important factor for understanding why the German analogy was embraced by Bush administration officials as a guide to the reconstruction of Iraq is the influence of standard operating procedures. According to CIA director George Tenet, it was at the beginning of January 2003 that “President Bush signed National Security Presidential Directive Number 24, giving the Department of Defense total and complete ownership of postwar Iraq” (Tenet, 2007: 419). Even Secretary of State Colin Powell, one of the few Bush officials to express reservations about the Iraq war, agreed without hesitation to entrust the planning and implementation of Iraqi reconstruction to the Department of Defense. Powell “thought it was logical [...]. It didn’t cross his mind that this was out of the ordinary. It was exactly what had happened after World War II in Germany and Japan” (Woodward, 2004: 282). In Rumsfeld’s view, “the de-Baathification policy in fact was akin to the Allies’ de-Nazification policy in Germany after World War II” (Rumsfeld, 2011: 515). Nevertheless, Bush was not convinced of the need to dissolve the Iraqi army, which was Bremer’s second decision in Iraq after de-Baathification. It is therefore understandable that the strongest proponents of the German analogy were at the Defense Department, led by Wolfowitz and Feith (Houghton, 2008: 181). In his public

comments, Wolfowitz said more than once that World War II “shaped a lot of my views” (cited in Ricks, 2006: 16), which is all the easier to understand when we consider that Wolfowitz’ family had been decimated by the Holocaust, as had Feith’s (Ricks, 2006: 77). The influence of the German analogy within the Bush administration owed much to the fact that it automatically brought to mind the procedures used during the rebuilding of Germany, without raising any eyebrows: “The more a particular historical analogy *fits the standard operating procedures and/or organisational interests* of the entity that a policy maker belongs to, the more likely its use by that policy maker” (Brändström et al., 2004: 208).

The best example of the prescriptive power of the German analogy and its practical application in Iraq is probably Paul Bremer’s approach. Bremer was appointed head of the CPA on 6 January 2003. In his memoirs, Bremer explicitly states his intent to reproduce the success of the German model in Iraq (2006: 17, 36). He saw his role as similar to that of Lucius Clay, the American plenipotentiary in Germany, or Douglas MacArthur, who performed the same function in Japan. Noah Feldman, an advisor to Bremer’s predecessor, General Jay Garner, described his colleagues’ sources of inspiration as observed on a long flight to Baghdad in the spring of 2003:

Pausing to take in the moment, I glanced around at my new colleagues. Those who were awake were reading intently. When I saw what they were reading, though, a chill crept over me, too. No one seemed to need a refresher on Iraq or the Gulf Region. Without exception, they were reading new books on the American occupation and reconstruction of Germany and Japan (cited in Galbraith, 2006: 97).

As Marie-Chantal Locas observes, Feith, Bremer and the CPA believed it was necessary to “establish a market economy in the country, a flat tax rate, a privatized industrial sector and oil industry, a new educational system, new military institutions and a democratic government that did not have a sectarian or ethnic basis” (2008: 17). She notes that those programs were directly inspired by the post-war occupation of Germany. The decision to carry out de-Baathification and eliminate all traces of the Ba’ath system in Iraq was justified by referencing the de-Nazification of Germany, both by Feith, who endorsed the decision at Defense, and by Bremer, who implemented it as soon as he arrived in Iraq (Bremer, 2006: 42; Ricks, 2006: 160; Feith, 2008: 430; David, 2010: 42-43). On numerous occasions, Bremer pointed to the German model as a guide to his decisions on Iraq – as did Wolfowitz, who said “we could replace ‘Ba’athist’ with the word ‘Nazi’” (Tenet, 2007: 422; Salomon, 2007: 120). During his first months as head of the CPA, Bremer followed to the letter what Michael Hirsh has called the “German protocol”

(2004: B1): a constitution was introduced, local elections were held, and finally sovereignty was gradually returned to the Iraqis. Indeed, official CPA documents refer to the parallels between the goals of reconstruction in Iraq and in Germany (Table 1), even more firmly embedding the German analogy in the CPA's bureaucratic approach.

Table 1. Comparative reconstruction milestones for post-Saddam Iraq and post-WWII Germany

	Iraq	Germany
Local Governments Installed	2 months	8 months
Independent Central Bank	2 months	3 years
Policy Established	2 months	14 months
New Currency	2 ½ months	3 years
Training a New Military	3 months	10 years
Major reconstruction plan	4 months	3 years
Cabinet Seated	4 months	14 months
Full Sovereignty	1 year	10 years
New Constitution	2 ½ years	4 years
National Elections	3 years	4 years
War Trials	pending	6 months

Source: Coalition Provisional Authority. 2004. *An Historic Review of CPA Accomplishments, Baghdad, Iraq*, [pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB654.pdf], p. 71 (retrieved on 22 January 2015).

Other historical analogies

A number of historical analogies other than the one with Germany were cited by the decision-makers in the Bush administration during the invasion and subsequent rebuilding of Iraq (see Table 2 and the Appendix). But they never gained the prominence or influence of the German analogy and neither did they contradict the approaches suggested by the German model; if anything, they sometimes reinforced them. These analogies were used by members of the Bush administration to (1) win the support of the public, the media and allies for their decisions, and (2) convince each other, at meetings and discussions among the decision-making team, of the relevance of the German analogy.

Table 2. Historical analogies with Iraqi reconstruction, used in public and in private by members of the G. W. Bush administration*

Analogy	In public (speeches, interviews)	In private (memoirs, memos)
British presence in Iraq, 1921		X
World War II	X	
Liberation of France, 1944		X
Reconstruction of Germany and Japan after the Second World War	X	X
Korean War, 1950-1953	X	
Totalitarian Soviet regime during the Cold War	X	X
Algerian War, 1954-1962		X
Vietnam War, 1961-1975		X
U.S. intervention in Lebanon, 1982		X
Gulf War, 1991	X	
Post-apartheid South Africa, 1990-1994		X
NATO intervention in Bosnia- Herzegovina, 1992-1995, and in Kosovo, 1999		X
War in Afghanistan, 2001-2014	X	X

* Quotes that refer to several analogies have been entered in the table only once. See the appendix for a more detailed table including quotes for each of the analogies used by members of the administration.

Some analogies were quickly set aside because they brought up political or military failures, such as the previously discussed case of Afghanistan. Similarly, comparisons with the Vietnam War did not play a prominent role during the planning for Iraqi reconstruction, although it was more recent than the Second World War. Obviously, the reason is that Vietnam was both a political and a military fiasco for the U.S., and also that “the military dimension of the two conflicts [Vietnam and Iraq] bear little comparison” (Record and Terrill, 2004: iii). The members of the Bush administration quickly dismissed any parallel with Vietnam, particularly when it came to regime change in Iraq. For example, at a press conference on 13 March 2002, President Bush contended that the Iraq war “is more akin to World War II than it is to Vietnam. This is a war in which we fight for the liberties and freedom of our country” (quoted in Fleischer, 2005: 230). In April 2004, “a reporter noting that ‘some people are comparing Iraq to Vietnam and talking about a quagmire’, asked Bush ‘how do you answer the Vietnam comparison?’. The president replied, ‘I think the analogy is false’” (Record, 2007: 168). So, because it represented a military defeat and a political failure (for President Johnson and, more broadly, for the U.S. on the international stage), the Vietnam War was quickly rejected as

an analogy that could serve as a guide to action in Iraq, confirming that “the most persuasive analogies appear to be those which promise not only *policy* success, but *political* success as well” (Houghton, 1996: 552).

Other analogies that involved setbacks were however used in order to draw lessons that could be transferred to the situation in Iraq. As he was preparing to go to war in Iraq, President Bush compared himself to Reagan – “he had come to consider Reagan’s battle against the Soviet Union as a parallel of his own struggle against Islamic extremism” (Isikoff and Corn, 2006: 1) – but the deaths of some 250 American soldiers in Lebanon in 1983, which ended the U.S. military intervention as part of the Multinational Force sent by the UN, did lead Rumsfeld to think that there was a “problem of dependency on U.S. forces in countries facing internal strife and violence” (Rumsfeld, 2011: 482), which may explain why the number of soldiers needed to maintain stability in post-Saddam Iraq was significantly under-estimated.

The analogy with the Gulf War is readily understandable and was repeatedly drawn by members of the George W. Bush administration: as we have noted, several members of the administration had been advisors at the White House during the George H. Bush administration and had actively participated in decision-making during the Gulf War of 1991. That may explain why many of them raised the analogy in 2003: it had helped shape their view of Iraq and its leader. For example, “Cheney had long-standing and firm views on Saddam Hussein that went back to when he had served as secretary of Defense during the first Persian Gulf War” (Isikoff and Corn, 2006: 4). While the Gulf War did not produce a political victory for the 41st president of the United States, it definitely left its mark on the members of his administration, “suggesting to them the example of the elder Bush’s strong determination against Saddam Hussein – something that may have worked on their own thinking in conscious or subconscious ways” (Yetiv, 2011: 232). Some observers also attribute mistakes made in the planning and implementation of Iraqi rebuilding in 2003 to the Gulf War experience: “Pentagon planners assumed that the most immediate postwar need would be to provide humanitarian assistance, deal with large numbers of refugees, and limit and clean up any environmental damage from burning oil well fires – all disasters that occurred during the Gulf War” (Daalder and Lindsay, 2004: 151). The soldiers on the ground were neither prepared nor of sufficient number to face the armed rebellion and civil disorder that broke out in 2003.

Finally, analogies with other nations’ experiences also helped shape the perceptions of U.S. policy-makers, reinforce comparisons with German reconstruction, and ultimately cement the predominance of those comparisons in the thinking of the decision-makers. For example, CIA director George Tenet alerted the White House to the danger of installing an American administrator to oversee the rebuilding of Iraq: “It may have

worked in World War II, after the entire world fought against Nazi Germany for many years. But in the context of the Middle East, it was not going to work any more than the French occupation of Algeria” (Tenet, 2007: 429). His warning was not heeded, but it did percolate in the President’s mind and Bush acknowledged that “the Iraqis’ first leader should be someone they elected. I was mindful of the British experience in Iraq in the 1920s. Great Britain had installed a non-Iraqi king, Faisal, who was viewed as illegitimate and whose appointment stoked resentment and instability. We were not going to repeat that mistake” (Bush, 2010: 249).

The ascendancy of the German analogy during the preparation and implementation of Iraqi reconstruction should not obscure the presence of other, equally important analogies. Some, such as the Vietnam War, were used to raise criticisms and point to obstacles; others, such as the Gulf War, were used to reinforce perceptions and policies. Any analysis of the role of historical analogies as factors of influence in the decision-making process must necessarily include all these secondary or indirect references which helped justify the decision-makers’ final choices.

Conclusion: The German analogy, an inevitable choice

While historical analogies have received considerable attention in political science research, their explanatory power with respect to the foreign policy decision-making process is fairly limited. First of all, it is difficult to isolate the role of historical analogies in cognitive processes with confidence, despite their usefulness for shedding light on cognition. Secondly, it would appear that “policy makers ordinarily use history badly” (May, 1973: xi) since they generally “do not know enough history and use the little which they know in inappropriate ways” (Dyson and Preston, 2006: 269). Notwithstanding this fact, choosing one historical analogy rather than another – or rather, giving pre-eminence to one analogy over the others in the foreign policy-making process – is a more complex move than it may appear at first glance, if only because of the cognitive complexity of the leaders themselves. Their experiences, beliefs and perceptions fluctuate over time and with events. What the studies show with increasing clarity is diametrically opposed to conventional wisdom and supports Robert Jervis’ view that analogies “often precede, rather than follow, a careful analysis of a situation” (Jervis, 1968: 471), even if they are often used after the fact to justify a decision that has already been made. So it is the decision-makers’ cognitive frameworks that determine the choice of the historical analogies that serve to guide foreign policy-making, not the reverse. As the referencing of the German analogy in our example shows, that comparison clearly helped define the approach taken by the White House in Iraq.

Returning to our two initial questions – why this analogy was picked rather than another and whether the choice was instrumental or predictable – our hypothesis was that the decision-makers’ cognitive predispositions influence their use of analogies. Our conclusion is that the choice of the German analogy was dictated, on the one hand, by the cognitive cogency of the reference to the Second World War, which supplied a compelling prescriptive roadmap (as demonstrated, for example, by Bremer’s decisions) and on the other hand by the weak relevance, in the eyes of the policy-makers, of alternative analogies, which in the case of some reinforced the choice of the German model rather than casting doubt on it.

Four points emerge from our analysis. The first is the importance of the cognitive framework provided by World War II to members of the Bush administration, particularly the neoconservatives. Once 9/11 was correlated with Pearl Harbor, Saddam Hussein with Hitler, and the Afghan insurgents with Nazi saboteurs (Cheney, 2011: 356), it became inevitable that the war against Iraq should also be understood within this frame of reference.

Secondly, the fact that the Iraq war was a war of choice forced the decision-makers to seek comforting analogies that promised victory. However, few examples of nation-building were available, and even fewer successful ones. Once they had rejected the Balkans and Afghanistan – where stabilization and reconstruction were not progressing well at the time the post-war strategy for Iraq was being considered – there really remained only the examples of Germany and Japan.

Thirdly, the fact that even the officials who were most critical of the military intervention in Iraq, such as Colin Powell, agreed that responsibility for planning and implementing the reconstruction of Iraq should rest with the Department of Defense is a measure of the predominance of the German analogy within Bush’s inner circle.

Finally, we note that the analogy with Germany was not the only one used by Bush’s decision-making team. Some analogies were quickly rejected because of their association with political or military failures (such as Vietnam) or with what were seen as mistakes during previous administrations (Lebanon, Kosovo). Others served to reinforce the choice of German reconstruction as the model for post-war Iraq by showing what not to do (Afghanistan) or by inspiring the determination to forge ahead despite dissenting voices (the Gulf War). In every case, the effect of these examples was to confirm the leaders’ choice of the German analogy as a guide to Iraqi policy at a very early point in the decision-making process.

All these observations suggest that it was the cognitive predispositions of the members of the G. W. Bush administration – including the president’s tendency to simplify issues (Dyson and Preston, 2006: 265) – that weighed most heavily in the choice of the German analogy to structure the rebuilding of Iraq, particularly since the prescriptive power of that analogy made it possible to dismiss all other analogies at the outset, even those that were closer to the leaders’ personal and professional experiences. In the end, the analogy with Germany served to garner the support of the majority of Bush’s decision-making team, as well as American public opinion. It could be summoned even when things were going badly on the ground. For example, Donald Rumsfeld explained that:

During World War II, cities across Germany suffered from looting and chaos soon after Allied troops entered. The northern city of Bremen was, as one shocked onlooker described it, ‘probably among the most debauched places on the face of God’s earth’ as liberated Germans looted stores, museums, and government buildings. Liberated Iraqis were doing the same thing, filling the temporary vacuum that existed between the old order and the new (Rumsfeld, 2011: 476).

More research remains to be done to investigate the role of historical analogies in general and those drawn with Iraqi reconstruction in particular. It is too early to identify the decisive factors in the Bush administration’s decision-making process with confidence. Many documents remain to be declassified before researchers can fully support their theories and hypotheses. However, two avenues for future research appear promising:

- Stephen Biddle’s suggestion, in a 2006 article in *Foreign Affairs*, that the post-conflict rebuilding of Iraq was modelled – politically, militarily and rhetorically – more closely on Vietnamization under Richard Nixon than on the rebuilding of Germany after the Second World War;
- The linkages between groupthink and reliance on one particular historical analogy. Does such analogic reasoning serve to “induce fear among decision makers” (Yetiv, 2011: 209) and thereby to facilitate manipulation of bureaucratic processes by “policy entrepreneurs” (David, 2015)?

Today, many of the key players involved in planning the implementing the reconstruction of Iraq admit that their most basic mistake was “to see Iraq not as it is, but as we wished it were” (Gailbraith, 2006: 12). Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the importance of studying historical analogies and their impact on critical foreign policy decisions.

Appendix. Historical analogies with Iraqi reconstruction, used in public and in private by members of the G. W. Bush administration*

Analogy	In public (speeches and interview)	In private (memoirs, memos)
British presence in Iraq, 1921		<p>George Tenet (NK): “Iraq’s history of foreign occupation, first the Ottomans then the British, has left Iraqis with a deep dislike of occupiers” (2007: 425).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): “I felt strongly that the Iraqi’s first leader should be someone they elected. I was mindful of the British experience in Iraq in the 1920s [...]. Great Britain had installed a non-Iraqi king, Faisal, who was viewed as illegitimate and whose appointment stoked resentment and instability. We were not going to repeat that mistake” (2010: 249).</p>
World War II	<p>Dick Cheney (NK): “Our men and women in uniform are playing a classic role, one that they undertook after World War II when they brought help and hope to the people of Europe and Japan. Now, in the Middle East, they’re earning the trust of the people they’ve liberated” (24 October 2003).</p>	
Liberation of France, 1944		<p>Donald Rumsfeld (CI): “Even more important, however [than organizing the Iraqi Opposition to assist with regime change] is the need to ensure that the post-Saddam vacuum is filled quickly by the right people. An attempt to run Iraqi affairs by ourselves <i>without</i> a pre-cooked umbrella group of Iraqi Opposition leaders could backfire seriously. A historical example may be instructive: (1) In 1943-44, FDR and Churchill had plans for an Allied Military Government for postwar France (i.e., an occupation government for France as well as Germany). They considered de Gaulle a phony. Only when de Gaulle was greeted by millions of cheering Frenchmen in June 1944 did they conclude that he indeed represented free France; (2) Had FDR and Churchill actually imposed an occupation government, the Communist-dominated resistance would have been the only significant political force on the ground in the country. The Gaullists would have been neutered, and the Communists would have ruled the countryside; (3) De Gaulle, in power from 1944-46, was able to expand his own political movement and effectively neutralize the Communists” (memo, 2002).</p>
Reconstruction of Germany and Japan after the Second World War	<p>Donald Rumsfeld (PC): “Indeed I suspect that some of you in this hall today, especially those who served in Germany during World War II or in the period immediately after the war were not surprised that some Ba’athists have kept on fighting. You will recall that some dead-enders fought on during and after the defeat of the Nazi regime in Germany” (25 August 2003).</p> <p>Donald Rumsfeld (PC): “The Iraq plan called for establishment of municipal councils in all major Iraqi cities. The Coalition accomplished that in 2 months. It took 8 months in Germany after World War II” [Rumsfeld went on to list all the steps that took less time in Iraq than in Germany] (30 October 2003).</p> <p>Donald Rumsfeld (PC): “But the difficult security situation truly makes our progress that’s being achieved even more remarkable. Think about it: not only has the Coalition managed to outpace the progress in post-war Germany, Japan, Bosnia or Kosovo – but they have done it under fire. They have done it, not in a pacified country; they have done it while fighting regime remnants, terrorists and also I should add criminals, some 110,000 who were let loose on the population of that country by Saddam Hussein who are aggressively</p>	<p>George Tenet (CI): “The assumption in the U.S. government was that this was going to be like the occupation of Germany, a supine country at our feet that we could remake in essentially whatever way we chose. [...]. In the view of Paul Wolfowitz and others, you could replace ‘Ba’athist’ with the word ‘Nazi’” (2007: 422).</p> <p>Douglas Feith (NK): “In my view, the reason to go to war with Iraq was self-defence. If that necessity drove us to war, the fighting might open the way for a new democracy to rise (as it did with Germany, Italy, and Japan after World War II)” (2008: 234).</p> <p>Douglas Feith (NK): “But the United States had much to gain from democratic political reform in Muslim world, just as we had gained a great deal from such reform in Germany and Japan” (2008: 236).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): “America and its allies haven’t taking on a job this big since the occupation of Germany and Japan in 1945” (2006: 17).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): “Let’s keep in mind the relevant lessons of Germany and Japan. Democracies don’t work unless the political structure rests on a solid civil society” (2006: 19).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): “We compared the occupation after</p>

	<p>trying to stop the progress that's being made" (30 October 2003).</p> <p>George W. Bush (NK): "In the images of falling statues, we have witnessed the arrival of a new era. For a hundred of years of war, culminating in the nuclear age, military technology was designed and deployed to inflict casualties on an ever-growing scale. In defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, Allied forces destroyed entire cities, while enemy leaders who started the conflict were safe until the final days. Military power was used to end a regime by breaking a nation. Today, we have the greater power to free a nation by breaking a dangerous and aggressive regime. With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians. No device of man can remove the tragedy from war; yet it is a great moral advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent" (1 May 2003).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): "Some believe that democracy in the Middle East is unlikely, if not impossible. They argue that the people of the Middle East have little desire for freedom or self-government. These same arguments have been heard before in other times, about other people. After World War II, many doubted that Germany and Japan, with their histories of autocratic rule and aggressive armies, could ever function as free and peaceful societies [...]. The history of the modern world offers a lesson for the skeptics: do not bet against the success of freedom" (9 May 2003).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): "The United States did not run from Germany and Japan following World War II. We helped those nations to become strong and decent and democratic societies that no longer waged war against America, that became our friends. That's our mission in Iraq today. We're rebuilding schools. We're repairing hospitals, restoring water and electricity, so the Iraqi people can live a normal life" (16 October 2003).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): "Some are skeptical about the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, and wonder if its culture can support free institutions. In fact, freedom has always had its skeptics. Some doubted that Japan and other Asian countries could ever adopt the ways of self-government [...]. Every milestone of liberty was considered impossible before it was achieved. In our time, we must decide our own belief: Either freedom is the privilege of an elite few, or it is the right and capacity of all humanity" (22 October 2003).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): "The sacrifices of Americans have not always been recognized or appreciated, yet they have been worthwhile. Because we and our allies were steadfast, Germany and Japan are democratic nations that no longer threaten the world" (6 November 2003).</p>	<p>World War II with our own challenge" (2006: 37).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): "In this regard, de-Baathification was similar in its intent and scope to [...] MacArthur's decrees in occupied Japan that removed the trappings of the militarist regime" (2006: 42).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): "We simply can't saddle the new Iraqi government with Saddam's massive debts. It'd be repeating the mistake the war reparations dumped on Germany at Versailles" (2006: 119).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): "[testifying before congressional committees in September 2003] I started to explain why the supplemental appropriation was important by noting 'the lessons of history', having in mind the failures following World War I and the success after World War II" (2006: 173).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): "I frequently lamented to my colleagues, 'There's no Ludwig Erhard'" [Minister of Economics under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who oversaw post-war economic reform and is credited with the "German miracle"] (2006: 201).</p> <p>Paul Bremer (CI): [to Colin Powell, 21 October 2003]: "We had to build a success story here that, like Germany and Japan, still looked good after 50 years" (2006: 204).</p> <p>George W. Bush (CI): "By adopting a Japanese-style democracy, an enemy become an ally" (2010: 397).</p> <p>Condoleezza Rice (CI): "Roosevelt didn't enter [World War II] to democratize Germany and Japan. When the war was over, the Europeans, particularly Great Britain, cared less about the form of the new government than about containing its power" (2011: 325).</p> <p>Donald Rumsfeld (CI): "During World War II, cities across Germany suffered from looting and chaos soon after Allied troops entered. The northern city of Bremen was, as one shocked onlooker described it, 'probably among the most debauched places on the face of God's earth' as liberated Germans looted stores, museums, and government buildings. Liberated Iraqis were doing the same thing, filling the temporary vacuum that existed between the old order and the new" (2011: 514).</p> <p>Donald Rumsfeld (CI): "The de-Baathification policy in fact was akin to the Allies' de-Nazification policy in Germany after World War II, which barred some 2,5% of the German population from postwar government service. In Iraq, by contrast, Department of Defense officials intended the policy to cover only one tenth of 1% of the population" (2011: 515).</p>
<p>Korean War, 1950-1953</p>	<p>Donald Rumsfeld (PC): "And so Korean freedom was won at a terrible cost, thousands and thousands of lives, including 33,000 Americans lost their lives. And the question is, was it worth it? You bet" (12 March 2004).</p>	
<p>Totalitarian Soviet regime during the Cold War</p>	<p>George W. Bush (PC): "President Reagan said that the day of Soviet tyranny was passing, that freedom had a momentum which would not be halted. He gave this organization its mandate: to add to the momentum of freedom across the world [...]. A global nuclear standoff with the Soviet Union ended peacefully – as did the Soviet Union. The nations of Europe are moving towards unity, not dividing into armed camps and descending into genocide. Every nation has learned, or should have learned, an important lesson: Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for, and standing for – and the advance of freedom leads to peace" (6 November</p>	<p>Paul Bremer (CI): "For almost three decades, the Baath Party had subjugated Iraq. Like the Nazis and the Soviet Communists, the Iraqi Baathist Party – dominated by Saddam and other Sunni Arabs – had controlled not only political life, but Iraq's entire society through a combination of police state terror and toadyism, while mismanaging a corrupt command economy" (2006: 38).</p> <p>Donald Rumsfeld (CI): "The Baath Party was less of a political party than a symbol of the state, much like the Communist Party in the Soviet Union" (2011: 515).</p>

	2003). Colin Powell (CI): “But so new is this freedom to Iraqis, and so distorting was the long nightmare of Saddam Hussein’s misrule, that many Iraqis remain hesitant and disoriented. We must remember that the nightmare that Saddam Hussein inflicted on Iraq lasted longer than Joseph Stalin’s tyranny in the Soviet Union. To expect the tragedy of Iraq’s past to recede swiftly is unrealistic. Wounds take time to heal, and even when physical scars disappear, often psychological ones remain” (4 November 2003).	
Algerian War, 1954-1962		George Tenet (CI): “The critical element was an Iraqi government that could have helped us. We decided instead to have Americans administer Iraq. It may have worked in World War II, after the entire world fought against Nazi Germany for many years. But in the context of Middle East, it was not going to work any more than the French occupation of Algeria” (2007: 448). Donald Rumsfeld (PC): “Unlike most twentieth-century counterinsurgencies, such as that waged by the French in Algeria, the goal of the United States wasn’t an Iraq that was disarmed and unable to resist occupation” (2011: 637).
Vietnam War, 1961-1975		George W. Bush (CI): “For the first time, I worried we might not succeed. If Iraq split along sectarian lines, our mission would be doomed. We could be looking at a repeat Vietnam – a humiliating loss for the country, a shattering blow to the military, and a dramatic setback for our interests” (2010: 367).
U.S. intervention in Lebanon, 1982		Donald Rumsfeld (CI): “My experience in Lebanon during the Reagan administration also demonstrated the problem of dependency on U.S. forces in countries facing internal strife and violence. By late 1983, the Marine presence in Beirut was just about the only thing keeping the country from either descending into a civil war or falling under Syrian domination” (2011: 483).
Gulf War, 1991	Jay Garner (CI): “The three things that worried us the most was the setting of the oil fields on fire, because [Saddam Hussein] had done that in Kuwait during the first Gulf War; large number of displaced people, refugees as a result of the war itself; or him using chemical weapons against the Shi’a or the Kurds, which he had done before several times” (interview, <i>Frontline</i> , PBS, 11 August 2006). Jay Garner (CI): [About the CPA-ordered dissolution of the Iraqi army] “Our initial plan when we were in Washington, and initially in Kuwait, was that this war went in much like the first Gulf War, where you have thousands of POWs, maybe hundreds of thousands. The army was about 400,000, so from that, we would bring between 150,000 and 250,000 back. We wanted to keep them in their unit structures, because they had already had a command-and-control system. They had vehicles, what was left. They knew how to take orders, and they had the basic skill sets to do the things you need to do in early reconstruction of a country. So they were a labor force, and they provide a certain amount of security, like guard static locations -- guard buildings, guard ammo dumps or displaced ammunition, that type of thing. By the 15 th of May, we had a large number of Iraqi army located that were ready to come back, and the Treasury guys were ready to pay them. When the order came out to disband, [it] shocked me, because I didn’t know we were going to do that. All along I thought we were bringing back the Iraqi army. Why we didn’t do that, I don’t know” (Interview, <i>Frontline</i> , PBS, 11 August 2006).	
Post-apartheid South Africa, 1990-1994		George Tenet (NK): “A senior NSC staffer told me that when he briefed the president on the de-Baathification, he talked about South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation

		program. Just as South Africans had done, Iraqis themselves should determine who had too much blood on his or her hands to be permitted to take part in a new government” (2007: 427).
NATO intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992-1995, and in Kosovo, 1999		Douglas Feith (CI): “As we had seen in Bosnia in the 1990’s, even if the military completed its security-related missions, it would not be able to pack up and depart unless civil institutions were also up and running” (2008: 316). Condoleezza Rice (CI): “The first [option to the reconstruction in Iraq] was to let the UN and its various agencies lead the effort. But the President had been to Kosovo in 2001 and been appalled by the lethargic UN presence more than two years after the war had ended” (2011: 191).
War in Afghanistan, 2001-2014	Colin Powell (PC): “States that sponsor terrorism are under international pressure and increasingly isolated. Much of this life-saving work has gone on behind the scenes. Meanwhile, U.S.-led coalition forces destroyed a major terrorist stronghold in Afghanistan. In the process, they liberated the Afghan people from the dual tyranny of the Taliban and al-Qaida. So too, the liberation of Iraq is a great victory for freedom. It has freed the international community from the threat posed by the potentially catastrophic combination of a rogue regime, weapons of mass destruction and terrorists. And it has freed the Iraqi people from a vicious oppressor” (30 April 2003).	Condoleezza Rice (CI): “The second alternative [to the reconstruction in Iraq, the first one being a Kosovo model based on a UN lead] [...] would be to follow the model of the postwar effort in Afghanistan. There we had used an ‘adopt a ministry’ plan with allied governments taking responsibility for various functions: the German had the police, the Italian had the Justice ministry, we had the army, and so on. That was already breeding conflict and incoherence, and no one wanted to repeat that approach” (2011: 191).

* We have listed the historical analogies used by George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, George Tenet, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage, Paul Bremer, Douglas Feith and Jay Garner with reference to the reconstruction of Iraq, or more broadly to the post-war phase, between 2002 and 2011 (the date of publication of the most recent memoirs). The analogies may have been used positively (to support the administration’s decisions) or negatively (to rebut criticism). They may have been used for reasons of political calculation (PC) or because of their cognitive influence (CI). The abbreviation NK indicates that the motivation for the use of the analogy cannot be determined. Quotes that reference more than one analogy have been entered in the table only once. The authors thank Florence Darveau-Routhier of the University of Sherbrooke for compiling the data.

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