# Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy: A Study in Weberian Activism

*Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Stuart J. Kaufman*

It has always been true that foreign policy debates tend to proceed on a weak evidentiary base, with clever quips or stirring oratory regularly trumping sound analysis. According to Thucydides, for example, the Athenian assembly that endorsed the Sicilian expedition during the second Peloponnesian War had only the haziest conception of the adversaries' capabilities.[1] Contemporary politics is distinctive not in the sloganeering quality of political discourse, but in the divergence between the quality of information available to society as a whole and the quality of information used in making decisions. For example, it was clear to any open-minded observer by the time of the Congressional vote in 2002 that implications of collaboration between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda lacked any basis in reliable evidence. By the time the Bush Administration initiated war in 2003, claims about Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons capabilities were also partially debunked and increasingly dubious. Still, the war went forward, and many Americans continued to believe the Bush Administration's false claims even after the Administration itself had abandoned them.

Many political scientists—like many Americans—were deeply dismayed by this situation, and in the fall of 2004 a group of us determined to try to do something about it. We saw two obvious options. One was to address the substantive issue directly, participating in the election campaign as *citizens* according to the logic that a new presidential administration would at least not repeat the policies of the Bush team. But anybody could do that, and our marginal contribution could only be modest. We decided instead, therefore, to attempt Weberian activism: to try to participate in the process as *scholars* by working to address the failure of the marketplace of ideas that led to these disastrous policies.[2] We did this primarily because participating in this way would allow us to preserve our professional integrity as scholars: entering the debate in a non-partisan way, and confining ourselves to disclosing "facts" rather than making pronouncements about "values," would keep us on the scientific side of the thin line separating science from politics.[3] Also, it would make our effort relevant not only to partisan opponents of the Administration, but also to those of its supporters who were open-minded on these issues.

The device we chose was an open letter that would set out the academic consensus on the relevant facts pertaining to the war in Iraq, and the consensus judgment of scholars about its negative effect. We formed a temporary grouping called "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign

Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy consisted of:

- **A core steering committee**—Stuart J. Kaufman, Mia Bloom, Neta Crawford, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Chappell Lawson, Daniel Nexon, James Richter, Jack Snyder, and Steve Van Evera
- **Technical and web support**—Nita Kaufman, Matt Spiegler, Maia Gemmill, Jennifer Lobasz, and Jesse Crane-Seeber
- **Those scholars who gave media statements**—Michael Brown, Michael Desch, Barry Posen, Jessica Stern, Thomas Biersteker, Avery Goldstein, Peter Haas, Robert Keohane, Robert Levgold, Ian Lustick, John Mearsheimer, Richard Samuels, Monica Duffy Toft, and Stephen Walt

There were also other scholars, too numerous to mention, whose contributions small and large made SSSFP what it was.

*Patrick Thaddeus Jackson is Associate Professor of International Relations in the School of International Service at the American University in Washington, DC (ptjack@american.edu). Stuart J. Kaufman is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware (skaufman@udel.edu).* *For helpful comments and feedback on this article, we would like to thank Monica Duffy Toft, Neta Crawford, Daniel Nexon, and three anonymous reviewers.*

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Policy" (SSSFP) to coordinate the effort. The consensus-building effort was a remarkable success: the open letter we penned swiftly attracted hundreds of signatures—851 at final count after only weeks of effort—from "international affairs specialists," overwhelmingly International Relations (IR) scholars in political science departments at American universities. Signers included many leaders of the IR field across the political and methodological spectra. However, in its larger purpose of public education the effort was a miserable failure, essentially because it received little news coverage. While a few U.S. newspapers gave attention to the story and there was some splash on the Web, the contribution the letter made to the national marketplace of ideas was vanishingly small.

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, normatively, we explain the concept of Weberian activism, explaining why we believe it is an appropriate stance for scholars who wish to engage in debate on public issues, and how the SSSFP effort followed the logic of Weberian activism. Second, empirically, as leading activists in the SSSFP effort, we chronicle what the group did and how the group did it. Finally, analytically, we offer some preliminary thoughts about why the effort did not succeed in achieving the intended educational effect. In doing this, we hope to provide an instructive lesson in the promises and pitfalls of scholarly interventions in the political realm.

## The Logic of Weberian Activism

A distinctive feature of the SSSFP project was that the intervention conformed to Max Weber's strictures about the conceptual separation between (social) science and politics. The SSSFP letter, while certainly originating in a set of value-commitments, was nevertheless something more than simply an expression of values; rather, the statement rested on the disciplined application of social science theory to the study of the empirical world. It was therefore "objective" in the Weberian sense, and defensible as an appropriate exercise of our vocation as scholars.[4] Despite its obvious and intentional relevance for policy, the open letter campaign and associated website were part of a campaign of science and education, not "just" politics.

The Weberian distinction between science and politics has often been misunderstood. To say that science and politics are separate endeavors is first and foremost to make a logical claim about the procedures and techniques appropriate to different realms of human social activity. "If you speak about democracy at a public meeting there is no need to make a secret of your personal point of view," Weber noted; "The words you use are not tools of academic analysis, but a way of winning others over to your political point of view" and "swords to be used against your opponents: weapons, in short."[5] But it does not follow from this distinction that academic analysis is somehow devoid of values. Indeed, Weber argues that

> there is simply no "objective" scientific analysis of cultural life—or, put perhaps somewhat more narrowly but certainly not essentially differently for our purposes—of a "social phenomenon" *independent* of special and "one-sided" points of view, according to which—explicitly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously—they are selected, analyzed, and representationally organized as an object of research.[6]

The inescapability of value commitments does not mean that "*research* can only have *results* which are 'subjective' in the sense that they are *valid* for one person and not for others."[7] Indeed, the distinctiveness of science is not that it embodies no value-commitments, but that it does something distinctive with those commitments. Value commitments place a specific duty on the practicing (social) scientist:

> A systematically correct scientific demonstration in the social sciences, if it wants to achieve its goal, must be recognized as correct even by a Chinese (or, more accurately, it must constantly *strive* to attain this goal, although it may not be completely reachable due to a dearth of documentation). Further, if the *logical* analysis of the content of an ideal and of its ultimate axioms, and the demonstration of the consequences that arise from pursuing it logically and practically, wants to be valid and successful, it must be valid for someone who lacks the "sense" of our ethical imperative and who would (and often will) refuse our ideal and the concrete *valuations* that flow from it. None of these refusals come anywhere near the scientific value of the *analysis.*[8]

The basic point here is that even someone who rejects our values should be able to acknowledge the validity of our empirical results within the context of our perspective. The fact that we have a perspective—that our results were produced by the application of concepts and procedures ideal-typically derived from a specific set of values—is philosophically and epistemologically important, but it has little bearing on the question of whether a piece of work is "scientific" or not. Instead, the decisive issue is internal validity: whether, given our assumptions, our conclusions follow rigorously from the evidence and logic we provide.

This respect for systematic procedure contrasts with the cacophony of the political realm, in which partisan opponents struggle to control resources and to enact their preferred programs without much caring about the logical or factual defensibility of their positions. Weber's famous call for a politician to have an "ethic of responsibility," and to strive to bring values together with practical realities, nonetheless accepts the struggle for power as constitutive for political activity.[9] Unlike the scientist, the politician bases her or his actions on a calculation of the likely political outcome; the scientist, by contrast, is "*wholly devoted to his subject*" and strives only for understanding and, relatedly, education.[10]

While this opposition is ideal-typical, we think it is correct, and that it provides a guideline for how we social scientists should think about intervening in the political realm in a way that does not compromise the detachment



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and the nonpartisan character of our enterprise. Weber suggests that the primary pedagogical task of the social scientist, as for any "competent teacher," is "to teach his students to acknowledge *uncomfortable* facts. By these I mean facts that are uncomfortable for their own partisan political views."[11] While Weber here refers specifically to the classroom setting, his admonition has clear relevance for how social scientists should approach matters of public policy.[12] Social scientists have the freedom—perhaps even the obligation—to engage in systematic value-clarification, pointing out the likely consequences of adopting a particular set of goals and a particular set of means to achieve those goals. Such value-clarification is likely to disappoint ideologues on all sides, as it will refrain from offering context-independent solutions to thorny social and political problems, but it might contribute to the formulation of more nuanced and realistic policies.[13]

This is the reason why we believed that Weberian activism was the appropriate tack for us to take. On the one hand, the problem we hoped to address was the Administration's failure to adhere to the ethic of responsibility—they were justifying policy on the basis of inaccurate factual claims. On the other hand, we were determined to avoid abandoning the scientific ethic appropriate to our profession—or even appearing to do so. The solution to both problems was the same: Weberian activism, acting as teachers rather than policy entrepreneurs, trying to encourage broad acknowledgment of facts and problems to make the debate on possible solutions more fruitful.

The SSSFP project sought to pursue these goals—to preserve the scholarly role of social science while educating the public—in two major ways. First was the tone and text of the open letter itself. The letter began by acknowledging the importance of the goal of fighting against "extreme Islamist terrorists" and commended the Bush Administration's initial success in pursuing this goal in Afghanistan. It did not seek to persuade anyone of the rectitude of this goal, but instead accepted the administration's declared value orientation and the goals that arose from it.

The bulk of the letter aimed merely at highlighting relevant, but not universally understood, facts bearing on the pursuit of those goals. The analysis was confined to exploring what the choice of specific means—primarily the invasion of Iraq—meant for the pursuit of the policy goal of combating terrorism.[14] As such, the letter was an exercise in value-clarification, in which the combined expertise of a myriad of scholars was brought to bear on an assessment of the critical issue of whether the war in Iraq contributed to or detracted from the administration's goals. For example, we could offer *as scholars* the assessment that a reconstruction effort that fails to spend the money allocated to it is "ineffective," because this assessment follows non-controversially from longstanding scholarly benchmarks in program evaluation. We did not draw from our analysis the partisan conclusion that George Bush is a bad president who should be replaced; instead we drew the logically inescapable conclusion that "a fundamental reassessment is in order" (though, of course, reasonable people might differ about how "fundamental" that reassessment needed to be).

Our second technique involved the independence of SSSFP from political parties and from the network of resources that fund and otherwise support them. SSSFP took no stand on the presidential election that was nearing its climax when the open letter was released to the public; it endorsed no candidate, and spokespersons emphasized that the reassessment of United States policy towards Iraq which was called for in the open letter would be equally pressing regardless of who occupied the White House.[15] SSSFP's efforts were internally funded; as the official description of the group averred, "We take no money from any sources outside of the scholars who have signed the letter, and their families."[16] This nonpartisan independence underscored the scientific, pedagogical function of the campaign.

On the other hand, SSSFP was an activist group. It took action by trying to attract attention to the results of this consensual scholarly analysis. We were activists, but we were Weberian activists, promoting not a candidate but attention to the facts and the logical implications of those facts. Our Weberian intervention allowed us to preserve our scholarly integrity and reputations—even though it may have come at the cost of political efficacy.

## Origins and Activity of SSSFP

Like any effort at social mobilization, our endeavor faced a collective action problem. The first glimmerings of effort came in the summer of 2004, when Kaufman contacted a number of colleagues to ask whether they would be willing to attend a public demonstration coincident with the upcoming APSA meeting in Chicago. This was the first idea for making Weberian activism work. On the one hand, the speeches would be analytical rather than polemical, aimed at airing scholarly analyses of the problems of U.S. foreign policy. The point of multiple speeches would be to show that the existing Bush policy had the remarkable quality of seeming disastrous by the standards of *every* major theoretical school in international relations. On the other hand, the idea was to provide an event for the media to cover, to increase the likelihood of attention. If hundreds or thousands of political scientists were willing literally to show up and be heard, reaching the same conclusion in many different ways, this might command some attention in mainstream media.

That effort was too little and too late. Few showed interest in participating, and of those few none had any experience in organizing protest demonstrations. Furthermore, the idea was floated late in the summer—too late to get on-the-ground organizing done, especially given the



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absence of volunteers located in Chicago to do the work. Some objected that any connection at all with the APSA meeting, even the coincidence of timing and city, might imply an unacceptable politicization of the organization and of the field, especially given the obvious partisan implications. But only a few said this. Instead, the decisive problem was the collective action problem: one of Kaufman's friends disarmingly admitted that he was too "lazy" and "cynical" to be willing to participate. The cynicism, as it turned out, was largely justified (though to what degree it was a self-fulfilling prophesy we cannot know).

The open letter, then, was a fallback plan, originally suggested by Sean Kay and pursued in earnest only in September, after the APSA meeting was over. The thorny question now was: what should the open letter say? Around what ideas could a consensus in the field be constructed, given the central reality that multiple logics yielded the same conclusion? And how could it be made as clear as possible that this was Weberian activism—a nonpartisan educational effort rather than a partisan attack on a Republican president?

The answer was not hard to find: an explicitly Realist logic was the way to go. The Bush Administration's prewar case for war was a Realist logic focused on response to threat. Weberian activism was therefore particularly relevant: we accepted the Administration's value-orientation, so to the extent our arguments were scientifically correct, they should have been valid for all who accepted that orientation, including most Republicans and Democrats. And once the facts were made clear, the Administration case for the war instantly fell apart: while the costs were high from a Realist perspective, the benefits were few.

Additionally, Realism is something of a median position intellectually. Liberal institutionalists are generally realists of the "yes, but" variety: realist logic matters, this school argues, but so do other factors. Those who identify themselves more as rational choice theorists or formal modelers are typically more concerned with clarifying realist logic than with challenging it. Constructivist logic starts from very different fundamental premises than the other schools, but on security issues it often leads in a similar direction, yielding insights in this case that Realists would derive on other grounds. Finally, in pragmatic terms, those few political scientists who are conservative or Republican are generally Realists, so gaining their early support in the effort ensured that any potential (politically) liberal bias was detected and rooted out.

The substance of the letter was simple. It said that the Iraq war was "misguided," in part because it diverted effort from the fight against terrorists in Afghanistan. It pointed out that on issues of aid to terrorists and WMD programs, Iraq was a lesser threat than other countries, including Iran and North Korea. It identified U.S. policy errors that contributed to the postwar chaos in Iraq, and pointed out the costs to the U.S. of the war policy. And it concluded with a call for a change of course and for a debate on a new strategy.[17] To balance the goals of addressing a public audience while presenting scholarly arguments, the letter was written in a style similar to that of an opinion-magazine article, but it also included extensive footnotes citing scholarly sources, official documents and news reports on key points.

Peer review and intellectual collaboration were at the core of the process. Kaufman wrote the earliest draft and forwarded it to Realist colleagues for analysis; Stephen Van Evera provided the first "reality check" and amendments. At that point, on September 23, Kaufman began to seek support more widely, and the effort gained momentum of its own. Within days, a flurry of e-mail exchanges led to the formation of an informal steering committee, along with a supportive group of more senior scholars that was pivotal in soliciting new signatures.[18] Requests for support also welcomed amendments, especially additional citations and corrections of fact (of which thankfully few were needed, but those few were important). A "technical team" took charge of creating a web site for posting the final product, and another group explored options for publicizing the letter. To provide a name for the eventual web site, this group created "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy". Networking by e-mail, the group managed to collect 652 signers in 18 days. By the time of the November election when the list was closed, the number was 851.

The eminence of the list of signers was impressive, including eight people who had held the office of American Political Science Association president, and twelve who had held the office of International Studies Association president. The intellectual diversity of the group was startling, including leading representatives of essentially every school of thought in international relations and comparative politics. A semi-random list of prominent names includes Hayward Alker, Lisa Anderson, David Apter, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James Der Derian, James Fearon, Ted Robert Gurr, Samuel Huntington, Robert Jervis, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, Margaret Levi, John Mueller, V. Spike Peterson, Barry Posen, Robert Putnam, Bruce Russett, Theda Skocpol, J. David Singer, Sidney Tarrow, Ann Tickner, Immanuel Wallerstein and Kenneth Waltz. As Robert Keohane commented for our press release, "I think it is telling that so many specialists on international relations, who rarely agree on anything, are unified in their position on the high costs that the U.S. is incurring from this war."

This overwhelming, bottom-up consensus between scholars whose analytical techniques and methodological procedures differ was quite unprecedented, and provides further evidence that the positions adopted by SSSFP were something more than a merely partisan intervention. It was this scientific consensus that SSSFP sought to publicize—not primarily to affect the balance of political power, but to produce "an open debate on how to achieve" the goal of combating terrorism, "one informed by attention to the facts



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on the ground in Iraq, the facts of al-Qaeda's methods and strategies, and sober attention to American interests and values."[19]

Questions of objectivity were at the center of two important decisions the group had to make about publicity. First, some signers had contacts in the Kerry campaign, and clearly there was a convergence of interest, since Kerry was making many of the same points. So some contact was unavoidable; how much was too much? Second, funding—what little there was—was provided within the group, primarily by the spouse of a signer. But would in-kind contributions, such as mailing lists of press contacts, be acceptable? What about efforts to publicize our campaign using newspaper advertisements?

The steering group of SSSFP wrestled with these issues over the phone, via e-mail, and in person for several days. A number of hypothetical scenarios, including one in which we would legally incorporate as a political action committee, were floated and discussed. The Weberian distinction between science and politics was central to our conversations: how much formal involvement in the political process, how many official ties and alliances with lobbyists and partisan war chests, would suffice to compromise our claim to scholarly objectivity? In the end, we decided that an offer of gratis public relations help from Fenton Communications, which was associated with MoveOn.org, would be acceptable. The line between partisan and nonpartisan activism grew most tenuous here. But we reasoned that allowing Fenton to publicize our efforts and to advise us on our press strategy did not seriously compromise the scholarly integrity of our basic claims.

## Public Impact: The Failure of Weberian Activism

A necessary condition for any educational effort to succeed is that people be exposed to the information being conveyed. SSSFP considered a wide range of alternatives for getting its message out. The internet was an obvious choice, and there was no disagreement that the Web provided a useful venue for initial publication of SSSFP's letter and supporting documents. The question was: what else? Newspapers were considered the best bet, with the main options being seeking news coverage, writing opinion articles, or buying advertisements.

Many signers suggested the advertisement route, and indeed many offered to contribute money to pay for an ad. Ultimately that idea was rejected as having too high a cost-benefit ratio: a lot of money has to be paid for a single exposure in a national newspaper. While the effect might be multiplied by buying multiple (cheaper) ads in regional newspapers, the only logic offered for this route was to place the ads in swing states—a targeting that would have crossed the line into more explicit political activity. The calculation we settled on was that the only way to be effective and nonpartisan was to get free media to "broadcast" our message. The hope was that by using all free media—placing Op-Eds mentioning the letter, issuing press releases to seek news coverage, and going on the World Wide Web—we could create a feedback loop that would amplify the message.

In the event, the message was not amplified very much. The biggest success came when Fenton Communication convinced the Associated Press to write a story. From there, the story was picked up by Agence France-Press and multiple foreign news sources from al-Jazeera and Britain's *Guardian* to Singapore's *Straits Times.* American news play, however, was minimal. A few major regional newspapers, such as the Atlanta *Journal-Constitution* and Columbus *Dispatch,* did stories highlighting the participation of scholars in their regions. A number of scholars succeeded in placing op-ed articles in their regional newspapers, in San Diego, Boston, North Carolina and elsewhere, and the effort made a small splash in the "blogosphere."[20]

The loudest dogs, however, were the ones that did not bark. Neither political campaign responded to the release of the letter. Predictably, since there were no pictures, there was no coverage by television news. But the biggest disappointment was an absence of coverage by the major "national" newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post.* The Boston *Globe* ran a Sunday story disparaging the SSSFP letter and a contemporary one by economists.[21] It was not a national story even for a day.

The reason for the absence of news coverage is a subject for study by media scholars, but some preliminary conclusions are possible. Most journalists seem to have concluded, for various reasons, that this letter was not "newsworthy" just three weeks before the presidential election. One journalist interviewed suggested that regardless of the measured scholarly tones of the letter, the effort was obviously "political". Expanding on that point, another journalist pointed out that academics do not represent an important political constituency as a group, while very few are "players" in national policy; so to the extent that this was a "political" effort, it was not newsworthy because it was not important. On the other hand, the extraordinary nature of the scholarly consensus it represented was not clear to journalists and was difficult to communicate (according to a journalist who holds a political science Ph.D.). Another point raised was that the letter was not prescriptive, and therefore lacked a news "hook."

The assumption of "political," i.e., partisan, motives was pivotal for the letter's fate. The implication was that the SSSFP effort was not Weberian activism at all, but a partisan attack—and a tacit call for votes against George Bush—thinly disguised as an educational effort. But the letter was not a partisan attack. We would have been delighted had the Bush Administration admitted that they now agreed with much of the letter's contents—which they in fact did, as they had moved away from many of



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their previous inaccurate claims (e.g., they had shifted from charges that Iraq had maintained WMD stockpiles to charges of its "WMD program-related activities"). The point of the letter, in a sense, was to bring *Republicans* (and independents) to see that current policy was not effective in pursuing the goals they endorsed. This was another reason why we began our effort by reaching out to scholarly Realists, some of whom were also conservative Republicans.

The partisan valence of the effort came from the Bush Administration's refusal to acknowledge the possibility that it might err. This stance proved rhetorically shrewd, because it not only projected an image of confidence and strength; it also allowed the Administration to claim that all criticism was motivated by partisanship. Indeed, in this sense the very situation that made the open letter necessary—the Administration's unwillingness to admit unpleasant facts—was what made our mission so difficult. We wished to move the political debate away from the need to uphold (or the impulse to attack) indisputable facts and onto the question of how to address them—ground which was not necessarily hospitable to Kerry and the Democrats. But the Administration created an atmosphere in which any such effort could be dismissed as "political"—i.e., partisan—and the media cooperated.

This raises the question of the media's role more generally, and in particular the status of fact in their work. One journalist on the "national" beat emphasized to us that "my main concern is watching and reporting what the candidates are saying and doing". Editors do often call for fact-checking highly specific factual claims by candidates (such as numbers), but according to one newspaper editor, they dismiss broader claims (e.g., Bush's "freedom is on the march") as political rhetoric that cannot be checked. Thus "national" reporters report what U.S. politicians say and do, "foreign affairs" correspondents do the same for foreign politicians, but nowhere in the process is there institutionalized a concern for the accuracy of candidates' broad foreign policy assertions.

Ultimately, this may be the reason for the failure of Weberian activism in our case: such efforts do not have a chance with the national media as long as the media report as equally valid any purported facts politicians find it useful to assert, as long as they are ill-defined enough. To the extent that the media has abdicated the role of *evaluating* factual claims, the reading and viewing public has few grounds on which to assess the basis of those claims. In such an environment, the distinction between political partisanship and scientific scholarship collapses, leaving scholars committed in some way to the pursuit of valid knowledge at a decided disadvantage.[22]

To be sure, there is reason to believe that even with the media's cooperation, the impact of Weberian activism would be limited at best (as the impact of Weber's own efforts frequently was),[23] since people's political actions are driven much more by value orientation than by factual argument. To the extent that political rhetoric matters, we believe that the symbolic and emotional content has more impact than its factual or logical content.[24] In this case, Bush's mythological language conflating the Iraq issue with a broader battle between defenders and opponents of freedom—that is, his appeal to nationalism and ideology—was simply more widely accepted than were the facts.[25]

To the limited extent that scholars' educational efforts might make a difference, however, the media are not currently organized to help. What would help would be a more Weberian media, one that aimed to advance and sustain the distinction between partisan puffery and defensible empirical claims. Unless that happens, efforts at Weberian activism will continue to face an uphill climb.

Nonetheless, we believe that Weberian activism is the strategy that scholars of politics *should* prefer. Attempting to uphold the distinction between science and politics by refusing to subordinate our analytical frameworks to partisan ends is the only reasonable way to preserve our intellectual integrity, and the only way that we can hope to sustain the claim that our scholarship has anything distinctive to contribute to collective discussions. Even if trying to remain detached and nonpartisan limits our political efficacy, these are the appropriate concerns for scholars to wrestle with as they contemplate weighing in on contemporary issues.

## Appendix 1: The SSSFP Letter

October, 2004

An Open Letter to the American People:

We, a nonpartisan group of foreign affairs specialists, have joined together to call urgently for a change of course in American foreign and national security policy. We judge that the current American policy centered around the war in Iraq is the most misguided one since the Vietnam period, one which harms the cause of the struggle against extreme Islamist terrorists. One result has been a great distortion in the terms of public debate on foreign and national security policy—an emphasis on speculation instead of facts, on mythology instead of calculation, and on misplaced moralizing over considerations of national interest.[26] We write to challenge some of these distortions.

Although we applaud the Bush Administration for its initial focus on destroying al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan, its failure to engage sufficient U.S. troops to capture or kill the mass of al-Qaeda fighters in the later stages of that war was a great blunder. It is a fact that the early shift of U.S. focus to Iraq diverted U.S. resources, including special operations forces and intelligence capabilities, away from direct pursuit of the fight against the terrorists.[27]

Many of the justifications offered by the Bush Administration for the war in Iraq have been proven untrue by



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credible studies, including by U.S. government agencies. There was no credible evidence that Iraq assisted al-Qaeda, and its prewar involvement in international terrorism was negligible.[28] Iraq's arsenal of chemical and biological weapons was negligible, and its nuclear weapons program virtually nonexistent.[29] In comparative terms, Iran is and was much the greater sponsor of terrorism, and North Korea and Pakistan much the greater risk of nuclear proliferation to terrorists. Even on moral grounds, the case for war was dubious: the war itself has killed over a thousand Americans and unknown thousands of Iraqis, and if the threat of civil war becomes reality, ordinary Iraqis could be even worse off than they were under Saddam Hussein. The Administration knew most of these facts and risks before the war, and could have discovered the others, but instead it played down, concealed or misrepresented them.

Policy errors during the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq have created a situation in Iraq worse than it needed to be. Spurning the advice of Army Chief of Staff General Shinseki, the Administration committed an inadequate number of troops to the occupation, leading to the continuing failure to establish security in Iraq. Ignoring prewar planning by the State Department and other U.S. government agencies, it created a needless security vacuum by disbanding the Iraqi Army, and embarked on a poorly planned and ineffective reconstruction effort which to date has managed to spend only a fraction of the money earmarked for it.[30] As a result, Iraqi popular dismay at the lack of security, jobs or reliable electric power fuels much of the violent opposition to the U.S. military presence, while the war itself has drawn in terrorists from outside Iraq.

The results of this policy have been overwhelmingly negative for U.S. interests.[31] While the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime was desirable, the benefit to the U.S. was small as prewar inspections had already proven the extreme weakness of his WMD programs, and therefore the small size of the threat he posed. On the negative side, the excessive U.S. focus on Iraq led to weak and inadequate responses to the greater challenges posed by North Korea's and Iran's nuclear programs, and diverted resources from the economic and diplomatic efforts needed to fight terrorism in its breeding grounds in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East. Worse, American actions in Iraq, including but not limited to the scandal of Abu Ghraib, have harmed the reputation of the U.S. in most parts of the Middle East and, according to polls, made Osama Bin Laden more popular in some countries than is President Bush. This increased popularity makes it easier for al-Qaeda to raise money, attract recruits, and carry out its terrorist operations than would otherwise be the case.

Recognizing these negative consequences of the Iraq war, in addition to the cost in lives and money, we believe that a fundamental reassessment is in order. Significant improvements are needed in our strategy in Iraq and the implementation of that strategy. We call urgently for an open debate on how to achieve these ends, one informed by attention to the facts on the ground in Iraq, the facts of al-Qaeda's methods and strategies, and sober attention to American interests and values.

Signed,

(The list of signatories is available with the online version of this article. Click on the "Open Letter List" link located under the article in the Table of Contents for this issue of Perspectives on http://www.journals.cambridge.org. APSA Members: Access the online article through MyAPSA and click on "Perspectives" in your Access Areas.)

## Notes

1 "The Athenians resolved to sail again to Sicily . . . if possible, to conquer the island; most of them being ignorant of its size and of the number of its inhabitants, Hellenic and barbarian, and of the fact that they were undertaking a war not much inferior to that against the Peloponnesians;" Thucydides 1951, 338.
2 On the failure of the marketplace of ideas, see Kaufmann 2004.
3 Weber's treatment of this distinction is subtle and often misunderstood, a point we develop in the following section.
4 Isaac 2004, 478–479.
5 Weber 2004, 20.
6 Weber 1999, 170, emphasis original.
7 Weber 1999, 183–184.
8 Ibid., 155–156.
9 Weber 2004, 83–84.
10 Ibid., 10. The question of whether Weber's responsible politician *needs* to adopt a scientific view of reality in making her or his decisions—whether, in effect, the point of social science is to help politicians to be more responsible—is a tricky one. While it is clear that Weber thought that social science could play such a role, his discussion of the responsible politician places more emphasis on the politician's *accepting* of the consequences of her action than on the reliable *forecasting* of those consequences. See also pages 91–92.
11 Ibid., 22. Translation slightly modified: we have rendered the word *unbequem* as "uncomfortable" rather than "inconvenient" (following, among others, Breiner 2004, 486), and have modified "personal political views" to "partisan political views" in order to better capture the sense of *Parteimeinungen.*
12 Isaac 2004, 477–478.
13 Breiner 2004, 487.
14 Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy 2004b.
15 Indeed, the overall message of the letter was not "vote for Bush" or "vote against Bush," but "don't vote for Bush on the grounds that his administration's national security is making us safer."



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16 Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy 2004a.
17 Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy 2004b.
18 Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy 2004a.
19 Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy 2004b.
20 Arreguin-Toft and Toft 2004; Haggard 2004; Hook 2004; Keohane 2004; Mandaville 2004.
21 Shea 2004.
22 It is entirely possible that this deficient media environment is in fact only a symptom of a broader set of weaknesses in the public sphere in the United States as a whole—a set of weaknesses brought about by the corporate consolidation of media companies, the increasing prominence of profit-making logics among editorial staffs, and other ways that the logic of the marketplace is displacing the logic of communicative deliberation. Although space does not permit us to delve into the intricacies of such a Habermasian critique, we are grateful to Neta Crawford for suggesting that there might be a much broader context to SSSFP's failure to attract media attention.
23 On Weber's politics, see Ringer 2004.
24 The classic formulation of symbolic politics theory is Edelman 1971; a recent application is Kaufman 2001. On the role of emotions, see Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000. For a broader effort to isolate a rhetorical mechanism not reducible to factual or logical content, see Krebs and Jackson (forthcoming 2007).
25 We thank Greg Kasza (personal communication) for pointing this out.
26 On the mythology, see Snyder 2003.
27 See, e.g., Fallows 2004b.
28 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004.
29 The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2004; Kaufmann 2004; weapons inspector Charles Duelfer concluded Saddam's Iraq had no stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, NPR "All Things Considered," October 6, 2004.
30 See, e.g., Fallows 2004a; Galbraith 2004; Edelstein 2004; Wright and Rick 2004.
31 On negative impacts on the war on terrorism, see Bloom forthcoming; Arreguin-Toft 2002; Pape 2003a, 2003b; Scheuer 2004. Regarding problems in Iraq itself, see Cordesman 2004; Rapoport 2001; and Jehl 2004.

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