Sleepwalking Democrats and American Public Support for President Bush's Attack on Iraq

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Since the threat posed by Saddam Hussein became the leading issue in American politics and international relations in late summer 2002, American public opinion has been out of step with public opinion in other western democracies. In the months leading up to the war, compared with citizens elsewhere, fewer Americans felt that war in Iraq was *unjustified*, fewer felt that UN-endorsement was necessary before a war could begin, and more Americans were willing to support unilateral action by the US.

Why were Americans more supportive of a pre-emptive war in Iraq? There were many reasons, but in what follows, I blame the Democrats in Congress. I focus on the Democrats because other factors shaping public opinion – such as the obvious reality that September 11 occurred in the United States and nowhere else – do less to distinguish America from other countries than did the behavior of our political elites in the months leading up to war. And I "blame" the Democrats because they lacked the courage to debate the merits of President Bush's foreign policy. Had they opened a debate, American public attitudes toward the Iraq issue would likely have been quite different, and much closer to those of our allies. This would have made it more difficult for President Bush to proceed with a war that lacked the legitimacy of broad international support of the sort seen in the first Iraq war, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. And it would have given Americans the opportunity to weigh competing visions of how to protect their physical and economic security in the post-9/11 world.

Failing to articulate a clear response to President Bush's security policy on Iraq was a mistake for the Democrats. The mistake may have rested on false assumptions about national security – something we will never know because the only world we will observe is the one that's seen a controversial preemptive war unfold in the face of broad international opposition. And the mistake almost certainly rested on false assumptions about optimal electoral strategy for the Democrats. Indeed, at a time when the core Republican supporters are a fragile coalition of extremists – whose opinions are much further from the average American's than are the opinions of core Democratic supporters – the leaders of the Democratic Party are tripping over each other to avoid confrontation with President Bush on the issues that are most important to Americans. This should stop. The Democrats must collectively articulate a coherent set of security principles that provide a

different pathway than President Bush's for addressing the security concerns of Americans.

Public Opinion on Iraq before the War

Table 1 shows public attitudes toward war in Iraq in November 2002 and January 2003. Support for the war was clearly higher in the US than elsewhere at both moments in time. In November, when it still seemed that the UN would play a central role in deciding whether to resort to war, 62 percent of Americans favored war. This was roughly double the level of support found in France and Germany, and was about 33 percent greater than the level of support in Britain, the US's greatest ally on the issue. In January, public support in the US was more nuanced, and in some ways less supportive of war. Fifty-five percent of Americans expressed the opinion that war should either never occur or should occur only with UN sanction, and a much smaller 33 percent supported unilateral war. Even so, the 33 percent favoring unilateral war was almost three times the level of support for unilateral action seen elsewhere.

The effect of September 11. Why the higher levels of support in the US? Perhaps the most obvious explanation is September 11. The horrible events of that day occurred on American soil, not in France or Britain or anywhere else. This simple

TABLE 1   *World public opinion regarding war in Iraq before the war began*

	November, 2002[1]:		January 2003			January 2002	
	Thinking about possible war with Iraq, would you favor or oppose [your country's] joining the US and other allies in military action to end Saddam Hussein's rule?		Are you in favor of military action against Iraq?[2]			Do you agree or disagree with American military action in Afghanistan?[4]	
	Favor	Oppose	Under no circumstances	Only with UN sanction	Unilaterally by US and allies	Agree	Disagree
Australia			27	56	12		
Britain	47%	47	41	39	10	68	20
Canada			36	46	10		
France	33	64	60	27	7	73	20
Germany	26	71	50	39	9	65	28
Spain			74	13	4	34	49
US	62[3]	26	21	34	33		

[1] Pew Global Attitudes Project, November 4–10, 2002
[2] Gallup International Year End Poll, January 2003
[3] Question in US: "Would you favor or oppose taking military action to end Saddam Hussein's rule?"
[4] Gallup International Poll on terrorism

reality may have made Americans more willing than citizens elsewhere to leave no stone unturned in the fight against terrorism, and more willing than citizens elsewhere to view the Iraq issue as one of internal security.

Though this may be part of the story, it does not seem a convincing explanation. If internal security fears were driving American public opinion, and if the war in Iraq were thought to be something that would enhance security, then we might expect those Americans who had the most to fear to be the most supportive of war. But this wasn't true. New Yorkers, for example, were much less supportive of the war than other Americans, even though most would admit that New Yorkers face the greatest terrorist threat. More importantly, citizens in other countries had roughly the same concerns about terrorism as Americans, as shown in Table 2. Indeed, although the French voiced significant opposition to war in Iraq, they felt a slightly greater concern about terrorism than Americans. This should be unsurprising given the relative geographic vulnerability of Europe to terrorists, and the constant reminders in the news that terrorists are lurking there.

Finally, the events of September 11 seem a bad explanation for understanding American public opinion on Iraq because, if anything, September 11 generated enormous sympathy and support for the US. Attacking Afghanistan, for example, posed many of the same problems associated with Iraq. It was a war against a Muslim country known to abuse human rights in a volatile region where the dangers of a protracted and expanded conflict were very real. Nonetheless, as the last columns in Table 1 show, citizens were generally much more supportive of military action in Afghanistan than they were in Iraq. Even the French strongly supported American actions in Afghanistan. As Robin Cook stated in a speech following his resignation from the British cabinet in mid-March, 2003: "Only a year ago, we and the United States were part of a coalition against terrorism that was wider and more diverse than I would ever have imagined possible. History will be astonished at the diplomatic miscalculations that led so quickly to the disintegration of that powerful coalition."

TABLE 2   *Perceptions of the terrorist threat around the world*

	Is terrorism is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all in your country[1]		
	Very Big	Moderate	Small
Australia			
Britain	23%	37	30
Canada	19	30	35
France	65	21	12
Germany	45	36	15
United States	50	37	11

[1]Pew Global Attitudes Project, November 4–10, 2002

The effect of anti-Bush sentiments. It is doubtful, then, that September 11 can adequately explain differences between American attitudes toward Iraq and attitudes of citizens elsewhere. A better explanation might be that citizens in other advanced democracies are actually closer to American citizens on the desirability of war with Iraq, but view the Iraq issue as an opportunity to express anger with the clumsy unilateralism of President Bush.

Evidence that this may be the case is found in Table 3, which shows results from a poll taken in mid-March 2003 – after it was clear that war was going to occur, but before the outbreak of hostilities. It is remarkable that even in France, the bastion of anti-war sentiment and anti-war diplomacy, citizens felt that Iraqis would be better off after the war than before, and that the Middle East would be more stable after the war than before. In fact, in every country surveyed, a plurality of citizens shared this opinion. Thus, although Americans were more confident of good outcomes than citizens elsewhere, American public opinion on the expected consequences of war was more in step with the rest of the world than American public opinion on going to war.

Table 3 also shows that those countries that had the deepest public opposition to the war also have the deepest suspicions of American foreign policy, and the highest dissatisfaction with President Bush. In Germany, for example, 59 percent of those surveyed said that American foreign policy had a negative effect on Germany, and of those 59 percent, 68 percent said this was a problem with the Bush administration, not America in general. Similar sentiments existed in other countries.

The anti-Bush attitudes have many causes. Most importantly, the Bush administration has consistently made policy decisions that privilege (perceived) short-term American gain at the expense of America's allies. Examples are well-chronicled

TABLE 3 *Opinions about post-war Iraq, President Bush, and the Israel-Palestinian Problem*

	People of Iraq will be better (worse) off in long run if Saddam Hussein is removed from power by US and its allies?[1]	The Middle East region will be more (less) stable in long run if Hussein is disarmed by the US its allies?[1]	American foreign policy has a positive (negative) effect on our country[1]	If "negative" in previous column, is it mostly because of Bush or (a general problem with America)[1]	What's the greater international threat to our country, Saddam Hussein's continued rule in Iraq, (or the continuing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians)?[2]
Britain	76 (8)	59 (22)	38 (39)	56 (31)	49 (32)
France	73 (14)	46 (37)	14 (63)	76 (15)	30 (46)
Germany	71 (15)	56 (32)	15 (59)	68 (30)	31 (48)
Italy	61 (18)	46 (27)	17 (52)	52 (36)	
Spain	46 (21)	38 (29)	14 (59)	53 (33)	
US	79 (8)	64 (17)			47 (34)

[1]Pew Global Attitudes Project, March 18, 2003
[2]Pew Global Attitudes Project, November 4–10, 2002

and include President Bush's rejection of the Kyoto Accords on Climate Change; his repudiation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty; his withdrawal of the US from the treaty creating an International Criminal Court; opposition to protocols in the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention; and his imposition of steel tariffs on American imports of steel. Of course, this unilateralism culminated in President Bush's Iraq strategy, where much of the world perceived Bush as defining international cooperation as an international willingness to support his decisions.

A second reason for the anti-Bush attitudes is a perception that President Bush's Middle East policies exhibit a double-standard. On one hand, he condemns the Iraqi government for its failure to comply with UN resolutions. On the other hand, he fails to similarly condemn Israel for its failure to comply with other UN resolutions, or to intervene in pushing for a resolution to the terrible crisis that surrounds the Israel-Palestinian conflict. As Table 3 shows, in continental Europe, the festering crisis in Israel and the occupied territories is viewed as a more serious threat than it is in the US, and as a greater threat than Saddam Hussein. Citizens elsewhere recognize that the crisis can only be resolved if the US takes an active role. But instead of seeing American involvement, they see a quiet withdrawal, even as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon allows Israeli bulldozers and tanks to demolish the homes and lives of people who are guilty only of living in the vicinity of individuals that Israel suspects to be terrorists.

Third, the anti-Bush attitudes are exacerbated by the difficulty citizens have elsewhere in stomaching the rhetoric of the Bush presidency. Much has been said, for example, about the deep religious content of President Bush's discourse. The fact that he invokes God's will in describing his own decision-making processes, and that he invokes religious terms like "crusade" and "good versus evil" to describe his "war on terrorism," sits very uncomfortably in countries where either secular or non-Christian attitudes prevail. Citizens elsewhere are also unaccustomed to the locker-room quality of President Bush's discourse. Other world leaders seldom speak of "smoking them out," "rapist" or "pygmy" foreign leaders, "showing your cards," "an axis of evil," or getting someone "dead or alive."

It is not surprising, then, that international opinion towards President Bush is extremely negative, and that the cost to the US of securing cooperation from its allies is increasing. Leaders of other countries are making the understandable calculation that allying with the US will reap few policy benefits and will cost electoral support. This reality reinforced the determination of many world leaders to use the UN to oppose President Bush's unilateral war, reinforcing public opposition to it in other countries.

It would be strange, however, to attribute the relatively strong support for war in the US simply to an emotional response elsewhere against President Bush. To do so would be to discount unfairly the possibility that opinions against the war have a logical foundation independent of attitudes toward Bush. In fact, citizens and leaders elsewhere may have believed that the best course of action was not a

quick jump to war without international consensus. This obvious possibility would lead to a different interpretation of the left-most columns in Table 3, one that does not suggest there is actual agreement between Americans and citizens elsewhere regarding the desirability of war. Rather, given the universally acknowledged evil of Hussein's regime, it should not be surprising that even the French thought the world would be a better place *in the long term* without him. But this hardly means that the French believed that a quick war without international support was the best solution, or that Iraqis or others in the Middle East would be better off with war than with other strategies to constrain Hussein.

The sleepwalking Democrats. In my view, the most important factor contributing to differences in public opinion between America and its allies is not September 11, and is not that George Bush is the American president rather than, say, the president of France. Instead, what distinguishes America most fundamentally is the absence of debate on the president's policy among Democrats in Washington. In other countries where leaders supported President Bush, there was a vigorous debate, with party leaders articulating cogent arguments against jumping to pre-emptive war. In the US, nothing of the sort occurred.

Democratic acquiescence to President Bush began on October 16, 2002, when many Democrats – including key leaders such as Joe Lieberman, Joseph Biden, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle – voted with the Republicans to grant President Bush the power to declare war against Iraq. Though there were critics of the vote within the Democratic Party, including Robert Byrd and Ted Kennedy, more Democratic Senators voted for the policy than against it. From that time until March, little was heard from the Democrats on the issue. Then, on March 20, the Senate voted 99–0 expressing support for the liberation of Iraq and for President Bush as Commander-in-Chief.

There were many things that the Democrats could have done to put forth an alternative security agenda. This is particularly true in the Senate, where the rules on filibuster and cloture create opportunities for minorities to have substantial influence on the legislative agenda. Indeed, we have seen this influence during the Senate filibuster of the appointment of Miguel Estrada to the US Court of Appeals in Washington. Yet despite the opportunities the Senate provides to minorities, the Democrats did almost nothing to challenge President Bush's security policy.

One of the few exceptions to Democratic acquiescence was Senator Robert Byrd. On February 12, 2003, he used the Senate floor to give a scathing attack on the Bush policy of war against Iraq:

> This Administration has split traditional alliances . . . has called into question the tradi-
> tional worldwide perception of the United States as well-intentioned peacekeeper, . . .
> has turned the patient art of diplomacy into threats, labeling, and name calling of the
> sort that reflects quite poorly on the intelligence and sensitivity of our leaders, and
> which will have consequences for years to come. Calling heads of state pygmies,

labeling whole countries as evil, denigrating powerful European allies as irrelevant – these types of crude insensitivities can do our great nation no good. . . . Our awesome military machine will do us little good if we suffer another devastating attack on our homeland which severely damages our economy. . . . On what is possibly the eve of horrific infliction of death and destruction on the population of the nation of Iraq – a population, I might add, of which over 50% is under age 15 – this chamber is silent. . . . We [the Democrats in the Senate] are truly "sleepwalking through history."

Byrd's speech and his opposition to President Bush's policy drew little attention. The arguments were not supported by other Democrats in the Senate, and given Byrd's isolation from his party on the issue, the remarks were not taken seriously by the media, which virtually ignored them. Thus, rather than offering leadership on the most important issue of the day, the Democrats in the Senate focused efforts elsewhere, deciding, it seems, that a filibuster on Estrada was the best way to win support.

The absence of debate existed in none of the other countries where the leadership in government supported the war effort. In the United Kingdom, opposition to the government's policy came primarily from within the Labour Party, which was divided on Iraq policy, and from the opposition Liberal Democrats, who controlled 51 seats in the Commons and were unified in opposition to Blair's policy.

The foes within the Labour Party were very active. They tabled motions condemning Blair's policy, they voted against their own party leaders, they risked sanction from their own party through strong denunciations of Blair's policy in parliamentary debates, they spoke out against war in public demonstrations, and three ministers resigned from the cabinet, including Robin Cook, Government Leader in the House of Commons. In his resignation speech, Cook argued:

The reality is that Britain is being asked to embark on a war without agreement in any of the international bodies of which we are a leading partner – not NATO, not the European Union and, now, not the Security Council. . . . Only a couple of weeks ago, Hans Blix told the Security Council that the key remaining disarmament tasks could be completed within months. I have heard it said that Iraq has had not months but 12 years in which to complete disarmament, and that our patience is exhausted. Yet it is more than 30 years since resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. We do not express the same impatience with the persistent refusal of Israel to comply. . . . Nor is our credibility helped by the appearance that our partners in Washington are less interested in disarmament than they are in regime change in Iraq. That explains why any evidence that inspections may be showing progress is greeted in Washington not with satisfaction but with consternation: it reduces the case for war.

In Australia, opposition to Conservative Prime Minister John Howard's strategy of cooperation with the US came primarily from the main opposition party,

Labour, and focused primarily on the importance of a UN mandate. On the Iraq issue, Labour, with votes from several minor parties, voted the first successful motion of censure against a sitting prime minister in Australia's history. (The motion was in the Senate and thus had no practical effect on the government.) Opposition leader Simon Crean stated during parliamentary debate: "I say to you, we must work to secure peace, that we will not achieve that peace by committing to the path of unilateralism you are so firmly locked in to.... The path to peace can only come through the United Nations."[1]

On the eve of war, the opposition attacks on government policy continued. Crean urged Howard not to commit troops without United Nations involvement, and he suggested that war would be illegal, calling on Howard to release the legal advice he received from his Attorney General: "It is morally wrong to [go to war] without the authority of the United Nations and it may be legally wrong, but in any event it's wrong."[2] He continued to voice his opposition after the war began, arguing, "For the first time in our proud history, an Australian Government has committed our service men and women to war against the clear will of the Australian people...."

In Spain, opposition to war also found its voice in the main opposition party, the Socialists (PSOE). In a March 3, 2003 parliamentary debate on Iraq – the first allowed by Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar on the topic – PSOE leader Rodríguez Zapatero argued that war was unnecessary because peaceful disarmament through the UN could be successful. He further argued against war based on internal security considerations, stating that no connection had been demonstrated between Al Qaeda and Hussein, and that the weapons used in September 11 were not of mass destruction but commercial planes. He feared that war would generate more hatred, which would be more dangerous to Spain than Saddam's regime. In an interview in *El País*, on January 31, 2003, Manuel Marín, the PSOE's secretary for foreign affairs, made similar arguments, and also underscored the importance to Spain of not alienating other EU members, especially France, which he argued "truly" helps Spain deal with terrorism from ETA.

Thus, in the countries where the governments were advocating support for President Bush, there was lively opposition articulated by the leaders of the major political parties, whereas in the US, such political opposition was absent. The silence of the Democrats on Iraq is relevant to understanding American public opinion in comparative perspective because American public opinion would likely have looked much different if Democratic Party elites had offered an alternative to Bush's vision of national security.

Political elites and public opinion. Scholars have expended substantial energies trying to understand the circumstances under which elites can shape public opinion, and when they must follow it. Though there is little consensus on this, it is well-accepted that when policies are complicated and touch on more than one issue, elites have more space to shape public attitudes. Iraq is precisely such an issue.

Consider the many different ways that a survey respondent who is asked about his or her support for a war in Iraq might think about the question. For some, this might be viewed as a question of internal security and the fight against terrorism. For others it might be perceived as a question about international diplomacy, the importance of legitimacy on the world stage, the morality of a preemptive war, the potential loss of loved ones, Israeli security, the plight of Palestinians, stability in the Middle East, or simple support for George Bush. Since even this long list is incomplete, one can easily accept that the issue of going to war in Iraq is a complicated one that can be interpreted from a variety of perspectives.

The Iraq issue is not only complicated in that it taps many different policy issues. It is also complicated because the answers to most questions that it raises are uncertain. Suppose, for example, that Americans viewed the issue as a straightforward question of national security. Does that mean we should have a unilateral war? It's not at all clear that so doing will make America a safer place, as the extent to which American action incites hatred or the chaos of war allows horrible weapons to leave Iraq are unknown. Of course, if the question of war in Iraq is interpreted in other ways, such as stability in the Middle East or the morality of preemptive war against a horrible tyrant, objectively correct answers are also unknown.

Scholars acknowledge that this combination of a multifaceted issue with considerable uncertainty creates substantial space for political elites to influence public opinion.[3] But this can only occur if the political elites disagree. Disagreement among political elites has two effects. First, conflict among politicians draws media attention, giving the issue public prominence.[4] Second, it influences how individuals think about the issues, causing many partisan voters to adopt the positions of their party leaders, and spurring the most sophisticated voters to invest energy into understanding the issue and forming an opinion.[5]

The Democrats in Congress neither rallied their core supporters on the Iraq issue nor posed arguments that would have triggered careful weighing of the issue among sophisticated voters. Given the invisibility of Democrats in the debate, and their tepid support for President Bush during votes in the Senate, perhaps the most surprising thing about American public opinion is that it was as cautious toward war as it was. And given this relatively high level of caution, it seems almost certain that had the Democrats adopted a principled stand against the strident unilateralism of President Bush from the outset, American public opinion would have looked much more like the public opinion found among America's allies.

Why Did the Democrats "Sleepwalk"?

Perhaps Senator Byrd was unfair to his fellow Democrats. Perhaps the Democratic senators were not sleepwalking through history, but rather had studied the issue carefully and simply agreed with President Bush that the time had come for a unilateral war against Hussein's Iraq, whatever the cost to the American

taxpayer, to our partnerships with our closest allies, to stability in the Middle East, or to Iraqis themselves. Or perhaps they simply believed in their heart of hearts that they could trust President Bush to make the choices that were in the best interest of the country. I doubt these possibilities. Like many others, I think the Democrats "sleepwalked" quite consciously. Remaining silent during the security debate was a strategic calculation based on a belief that it would be optimal electorally to emphasize other issues, even though security issues were important to voters.

Although there were probably some true believers in the Bush policy among the Democrats, it seems doubtful that the core of the party could have uniformly agreed with its wisdom, given the powerful arguments against it. These arguments against attacking Iraq were not simply articulated by leaders elsewhere in the world, but by leaders in the US, including some prominent conservatives. Indeed, President Bush's own father wrote in his 1998 book with Brent Scowcroft:

> We should not march into Baghdad.... To occupy Iraq would instantly shatter our coalition, turning the whole Arab world against us, and make a broken tyrant into a latter-day Arab hero.... It could only plunge that part of the world into even greater instability.[6]

Leading academics such as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, no doves on American foreign policy, argued in a prominent *Foreign Affairs* article that the threat of weapons of mass destruction from Saddam Hussein could be contained without going to war. Congress was also receiving intelligence reports from the CIA that underscored the dangers of attacking Hussein. In an October 8, 2002 hearing at the Senate Intelligence Committee, CIA director George Tenet stated, "Should Saddam conclude that a US-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions." The Agency also believed that "Saddam might decide that the extreme step of assisting Islamist terrorists in conducting a WMD [weapons of mass destruction] attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him."

It was not difficult, then, to think carefully about the pros and cons of President Bush's unilateralist strategy and to come to a different conclusion than Bush did. What seems implausible is that the Democrats did so, and reached a conclusion that was consistent with President Bush's. This seems particularly unlikely given the general absence of public arguments from Senators favoring an attack. What we got instead was tepid silence.

It also seems unlikely that the Democrats acquiesced to President Bush because they trusted him. His record of unilateralism certainly made it doubtful that he could be trusted to win support for his Iraq policy from America's key allies. His administration also made claims that made it difficult to trust him. For example, in his October 2002 testimony, CIA director Tenent informed senators

that his agency had concluded that a terrorist attack by Hussein on the US was unlikely. At this same time, while traveling the country before the Congressional elections, President Bush repeatedly argued that such an attack was likely and to be feared.[7] Trust in Bush was also diminished by the well-chronicled "mistake" made by his administration when it used false evidence to claim that Iraq had attempted to buy uranium from Niger. There have been revelations that companies headed by friends of the Bush administration may have received contracts to rebuild Iraq long before the diplomatic dead-end had arrived. And, of course, the administration's zigzags in justifying war itself – which ran from eliminating weapons of mass destruction to regime change to bringing democracy to the entire Middle East region – were not the clay from which trust is molded.

The most obvious explanation for the sleepwalking Democrats, then, is not policy agreement with President Bush, or trust in his leadership. Instead, it is that elected party leaders calculated that their future electoral success would be greatest if they "changed the subject," diverting attention away from security and Iraq and toward other issues like the economy. The strategy of avoiding the issue of terrorism and focusing instead on the economy was articulated by Democratic leaders as far back as December 2001. At that time, Nancy Pelosi, who had just been named minority whip of the Democratic Party in the House, said: "I will make the economy the central organizing principle of the office.... I am doing this with [outgoing Democratic leader in the House] Dick Gephardt's full support . . . not on my own." Around that same time, in a fundraising letter, Gephardt wrote: "in the campaign ahead, we (Democrats) will discuss how best to stimulate the American economy, protect our environment, strengthen our children's education, improve our nation's health care system, fund Medicare and Medicaid and safeguard Social Security for an increasing number of seniors." At this time, 39 percent of Americans said their number one concern was terrorism.[8]

The logic of the Democrat's "conscious sleepwalk" rests on the premise that historically, the Republicans are viewed as the "party of defense." Thus, the argument goes, when issues of defense arise, the Democrats will be hard pressed to convince Americans that the Democrats can protect Americans better than the Republicans. Moreover, when a catastrophe like September 11 befalls a country, a natural political advantage goes to the incumbent who responds to the catastrophe. Given this reality, the Democrats thought their best chance was to convince Americans that other issues were more important than internal security.

This has been a bad strategy for the Democrats and an unfortunate strategy for the country. First, although elites often can influence which issues the voters think are important, such influence is most difficult when physical or economic security is at stake. Just as it's difficult to tell the unemployed voter that the real issue of the day is school prayer rather than jobs, it's difficult to tell the scared voter he should worry more about judicial appointments than about physical security. Americans worry about the threat of terrorism and they want their government to provide leadership on the issue.

Second, the events of September 11 underscored the simple fact that traditional conceptions of security policy were obsolete, making new security strategies for America essential. The Bush administration exhibited leadership in responding to the changed world by articulating a strategic response and pursuing it vigorously. This response involves focusing narrowly on rooting out and arresting or killing suspected terrorists, on privileging this strategy of suppression over the constitutional protections of individual rights, and on pursuing the strategy with a single-minded unilateralism that knows no borders. Indeed, the Iraq war demonstrates nothing if not the Bush administration's willingness to employ the United States military to attack suspected terrorist regimes, and to do so unilaterally if traditional allies do not support such attacks.

President Bush's dogged determination in implementing this strategy is indisputable, but whether it's the right strategy for American security is not. On the contrary, there are arguments from every corner of the political spectrum that President Bush's approach is wrong for America. There are legitimate concerns that pre-emptive wars will increase terrorism by enflaming passions in the Arab world and making it more difficult to gain the cooperation of other countries in efforts to uncover and incapacitate terrorist cells. There are legitimate concerns that a crucial supplement to the suppression of terrorism lies in addressing the conditions that create it, which involves intervening credibly in conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian one. There are legitimate concerns that the cost of invasion, occupation, and rebuilding of countries like Iraq are disproportionate to the security return, and that there are greater returns on the security dollar elsewhere. There are legitimate concerns about where America's right to engage unilaterally in preemptive war begins and ends. And, of course, posed against these legitimate concerns and others are equally legitimate ones about weapons of mass destruction, and connections between leaders of rogue nations and terrorists.

So the issues are complex and deserve debate by our political elites. This debate has unfolded in other countries – even in ones like the UK and Australia, where as in the US the threat of terrorism is significant and there exists a large conservative party that is traditionally viewed as "the party of defense." In those countries, citizens heard alternative arguments from their political leaders. As a result, they hardly lined up willy-nilly behind their "party of defense" or in favor of a narrow focus on "dead or alive" at any cost. It is not clear, then, that the American public would have punished the Democrats for having a debate or presenting them with a different plan for achieving security. Indeed, it's more likely that many Americans would have been receptive to a Democratic vision for how to respond to the new security threats.

Finally, the problem with sleepwalking Democrats is not simply that they are depriving Americans of leadership and debate on a central issue. It's also bad electoral strategy. The Bush administration's Iraq policy is like many other policies of his administration – narrowly tailored to the Republican's core supporters. And just as the policies are extreme relative to the desires of most Americans, so

are the attitudes of the core supporters. Indeed, today the core supporters of the Republican Party are a fragile coalition of extremists who are out of step with the average American on most issues.

Table 4 provides data on this extremism from the 2000 National Election Study, a survey conducted by academics during each American national election. The table shows the positions of strong Democrats, strong Republicans, and all respondents on a variety of issues. On every single issue, the average citizen is closer to the strong Democrats than to the strong Republicans, usually about one-third of a point (on a 5 point scale), and as much as six-tenths closer on protecting the environment. The average citizen is even closer to the strong Democrats on defense!

Not only are the core supporters of the Republicans more extreme than the Democrats, they are a fragile coalition of extremists. By that I mean that the Republicans who are extreme on some issues are not the same Republicans who are extreme on others. One way to see this is by looking at the correlations of issue attitudes. For example, among strong Republicans the correlation of attitudes toward defense with attitudes toward school integration is only .04, and the correlation of attitudes toward abortion with attitudes toward the environment is only .09. In general, the Republicans with extreme attitudes on social issues related to religious fundamentalism – like abortion and gay rights – are not the same people as the Republicans with extreme attitudes on economic issues – such as the relative importance of jobs versus the environment, or the desirability of government provision of health care. Such a coalition of extremists should not win elections, and its a testament to the brilliance of the Republican leadership – or perhaps a reflection on the Democratic Party – that the Republicans control all

TABLE 4   *2000 NES evidence of the Republican coalition of extremists*

	Defense spending (1 = least to 5 = most)	Legal adoption by gays (1 = Yes, 5 = No)	Government encourage school integration (1 = encourage, 5 = Stay out)	Environment (1) versus jobs (5)	Government provide medical insurance (1) to private medial insurance (5)	Right to choose (1 = Never to 4 = Always woman's choice)	Religion important (1 = Important, 5 = Not important)
Strong Democrats (19% of respondents)	3.22	2.92	2.21	2.30	2.08	3.01194	1.81
All respondents	3.60	3.20	2.88	2.27	2.86	2.885097	1.945
Strong Republicans (13% of respondents)	4.34	3.90	3.90	2.90	4.03	2.539474	1.482
Republican extremism[1]	.35	.43	.35	.60	.38	.22	.33

[1]Measures how much closer the average voter is to the strong Democrats than to the strong Republicans.

three branches of government by appealing to core constituents who are not only unlike average Americans, but also unlike each other.

Open a Debate by Acting like a "Party"

The Democrats face the obvious problem that having been silent through much of the debate on the most important policy decision that America has made in some time, it is now more difficult for them to be a serious voice on the significant security issues that continue to face the country. Should the Democrats join the debate about security in the post-9/11 world? Could they be credible in efforts to shape policy, and would it help the party? The answers are "Yes," but only if Democrats in Washington can overcome the significant impediments that exist to their acting like a genuine political party, and put forth a coherent, *collective* strategy for addressing security threats to the US.

Collective coherence is crucial. Since the Republican majority stands solidly behind the decisive policies of the president, individual Democrats who make personal remarks in response to current events will not influence public attitudes. To influence debate on this issue, the diverse group of Democratic legislators must commit to a set of principles that will serve as a foundation for Democratic policymaking on security. By articulating a set of "Democratic" security principles, the members of the party will have a credible voice that holds President Bush accountable for his security missteps. They will also give voters an opportunity to learn what they can expect from Democrats on security issues if the Democrats retake control of government. Moreover, showing leadership on the difficult security issue will make Democratic efforts to talk about other issues more credible. A party policy on security, then, can only help the party.

But executing the "collective coherence" strategy poses two problems: establishing the general principles to guide policymaking, and acting cohesively in support of these principles. The second problem is more formidable than the first. The American political system – with its primary system of nominating candidates, its candidate-centered campaign finance laws, and its separation of executive and legislative powers – does not create the incentives for party cohesion that exist in most other advanced democracies, especially for the "opposition" party. Since the institutions do not create opportunities for the Democrats to be "whipped" into toeing a non-existent party line, collective coherence can only emerge if the vast majority of members decide it's in their individual interest to create and maintain party discipline. Though it's difficult to find instances of this occurring, there are moments in American history where individuals who share a party label have found it in their interest to act collectively. The Republicans' "Contract with America" in 1994 is a recent example, and their relatively high level of collective coherence has often been considered crucial to their success at seizing control of Congress from the Democrats. Since the threat of terrorism is a deep concern that is unlikely to go away anytime

soon, if the Democrats do not have an effective voice on the issue, they risk becoming entrenched for a very long time in the minority. This prospect should provide sufficient incentives for individuals in the party to act purposefully and collectively on security issues.

For a collective Democratic approach to security to be effective, the Democratic security principles must be ideas around which the diverse Democrats can unite, must be oriented towards achieving American security needs, and must be different from the "unilateral suppression at any cost" strategy of the Bush administration. The events surrounding the Iraq war suggest at least three principles that fit this bill. The first is the security value of strong alliances. Terrorism is not a problem unique to the US. Indeed, if there has ever been an issue that should unite us with allies, this is it. The Democrats should remind voters that since terrorist cells exist worldwide, close collaboration with our allies to fight terrorism will make Americans safer than will the strident unilateralism of President Bush.

The second principle should be that the US will increase its security by addressing the conditions that breed terrorism. So doing is not, as the Bush administration seems to believe, a sign of weakness. Instead, as noted by many European leaders during the Iraq debate, it is a sensible strategy for reducing the number of individuals who want to make terrorist attacks on Americans. Front and center, of course, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but other issues are also important, such as American support for regimes that flagrantly disregard human rights. The US will also diminish terrorist incentives if American military efforts have the legitimacy afforded by a broad international consensus.

The third principle should be that security policy and economic policy are inextricably intertwined, and should be discussed together. Terrorist attacks hurt the economy, requiring tight security, but security is expensive to the tax payer, which also hurts the economy. It is therefore crucial to introduce a dose of economic cost-benefit analysis into the security debate.

It is astonishing that the costs to the American economy of going it alone on Iraq received so little discussion in Congress. Members wanted to know the cost, but since the decision to attack Iraq unilaterally was not scrutinized, the relevance of this cost was unclear. Perhaps attacking and rebuilding Iraq without the support of our allies was the most cost-effective way to enhance American security, but it is also quite possible that it was not. The cost of attacking and rebuilding Iraq, for example, would have been much less if it were shared with the EU and UN. These cost savings could have freed up more dollars for homeland security, providing, for example, money for cash-strapped municipalities that provide domestic security, or for American ports that inspect cargo ships, or for airport security, or for the intelligence community's efforts to uncover and dismantle terrorist cells. If the Democrats indeed want the voters to focus on the economy, they should marry the discussions of economic and security policies, and articulate an agenda for thinking about the security return on taxpayer dollars of different security policies.

If Democrats in Congress could begin to articulate a coherent Democratic position on defense, it would not only be good for the Democrats, it would be good for American democracy. Although critics often decry partisan politics in Washington, and radical Republicans aggressively condemn anyone who dares disagree with President Bush's security policies, conflict and debate are crucial to a healthy democratic society. Partisan conflict draws the attention of the media, and debate educates citizens. Policy disagreements therefore make politicians more accountable to voters than they otherwise would be. When policy conflict unfolds across cohesive parties, the debates are sharper and more informative – and thus better for society – than when politicians either do not confront each other on important issues, or do so with a cacophony of individual voices. Elected representatives within the Democratic Party should recognize that they and the country will benefit if the Democrats articulate a clear security policy, one that offers Americans a different pathway to physical and economic security than the Bush administration's emphasis on unilateralism and suppression of suspected terrorists at any cost.

NOTES

1. See Hobart Mercury, 5 February 2003, http://www.newsaustralia.com/Australia-War-on-iraq/pm_trying_to_justify_war_says_cr.htm

2. See http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s808527.htm.

3. See V.O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For an interesting review of the issues, see Robert Y. Shapiro, "Public Opinion, Elites and Democracy," *Critical Review* 12, no. 4 (1998): 501–28.

4. See Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1987).

5. For a very interesting study that examines how attack attitudes elevate debate in American democracy, see John Geer, *Attacking Democracy: A Defense of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns*, mansucript, Vanderbilt University, 2003.

6. George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Random House, 1998).

7. http://www.thenation.com/capitalgames/index.mhtml?bid=3&pid=119.

8. From David Broder, Washington Post Writers Group, "Democrats want to change subject," 3 December 2001.