3. **History’s actors: insights into the ‘war on terror’ from international relations theory**

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We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left just to study what we do. (A senior advisor to George W. Bush, 2004 quoted in Suskind, 2004; see also Ferguson, 2005, p. vii)

**INTRODUCTION**

The image of the Bush administration (at least prior to the 2006 congressional elections) as a self-interested elite leading a rogue nation – to some, even a right-wing terrorist force – is now popular among not merely the radical left, but even among moderate political commentators (Chomsky, 2003, 2006; Coleman, 2003; Prestowitz, 2003). Yet, such a polemical position obscures the crucial subtleties of the so-called ‘war on terror’. This chapter argues that the aims of the Bush administration’s ‘war’ are far from being restricted to the ruthless augmentation of US wealth and power in the world. The war also seeks to reassert the authority of the US state in the international system, to secure retribution, and to reassert the US body politic’s own identity to itself domestically, as well as to pursue a neo-conservative moral mission. One thing that is notable about this list is that, in spite of the rhetoric, the different goals of US foreign policy serve the interests of different manifestations of ‘the United States of America’. Sometimes it is US business interests, other times it is the current Bush administration, sometimes it is the US state understood as an entity that endures through changing administrations, and at yet other times it is the rather more amorphous notion of the US body politic.

This chapter assesses the likely impact on the international system and international society of each of these motivations for the ‘war on terror’.
In part, it seeks to cast doubt on the chilling arrogance of the senior advisor to George W. Bush quoted at the start of this chapter. In part, it seeks to analyse the likely effects of the elite’s attempt to manipulate international society. The next section highlights certain debts that Bush’s war policy owes to neo-conservative think-tanks and lobby groups, especially the Project for the New American Century. The following section sketches a theory of state sovereignty which emphasises the dependence of sovereignty on official (particularly juridical) recognition by other state and non-state actors. It will be shown that this familiar model assumes an unrealistic theory of recognition. In fact, identity and sovereignty are derived from the inherently dynamic processes of intersubjective recognition. The section ends by noting that this revised theory is unlikely to produce significant order at the international level. The consequent need for institutional articulation and enforcement of the processes of dynamic recognition and their results is explored in the subsequent section. It is argued that institutionalisation must be led by powerful actors. The frequent absence of the great powers acting as ‘great responsibles’ and the clash of vitality and power together represent the tragic heart of international society (Bull, 1977, ch. 9; 1980). The penultimate section returns to the ‘war on terror’ with this wider perspective in mind. It argues that the theological presuppositions underpinning the present war policy will distort, not just the functioning of international society, but also the lives of the actors who together constitute that society. (I examine one instance of such distortion elsewhere in this volume.) The chapter concludes that any good that may come from any continuation of this ‘war’ in its current form will be more than offset by its long-run consequences. The chapter closes with the reflection that the policy already seems to be under pressure and so may pass away anyway with the conclusion of the Bush regime.

**BUSH’S NEO-CONSERVATIVE WAR**

The traditional criteria for waging a just war are familiar: a competent authority is justified in engaging in armed conflict with another state or non-state actor when that actor has deliberately, seriously and directly violated the authority’s safety and integrity or that of its population; such conflict must be a last resort to secure peace, the response must be proportionate to the wrong, and the chosen strategy must have a good probability of success. When these conditions are met it is legitimate for the victim to respond against the perpetrator with organised and sustained violence.

The ‘war on terror’ meets few of these traditional criteria. The spectacular acts of aggression that, officially at least, sparked military actions by
the ‘coalition of the willing’ against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Ba’athist regime in Iraq were perpetrated by what is at most a loose terrorist network. The ‘aggressor’ is, in the words of the Bush administration, ‘a far more complex and elusive set of targets’ (White House, 2002, ch. 9) than is presupposed by traditional just war theory (Brzezinski, 2004, p. 215). In reality, al-Qaeda is probably more a symbol or rallying point for certain Islamic populations disaffected by the imposition of culturally arrogant and socially destructive Western capitalism, individualism and liberalism, than it is a military organisation with definite strategies and an effective command structure. There appears little possibility of the coalition winning a war against something as poorly defined, expansive and apparently endemic as ‘terror’ (ibid., pp. 215–16). Next, the former Iraqi state’s alleged link to al-Qaeda is effectively non-existent (Ritter, 2002, pp. 45–6). The March 2003 Iraq invasion was not launched as an option of last resort, and indeed sanctions, diplomatic pressure and the weapons inspection regime were still supported by the United Nations (UN). Moreover, the coalition’s ‘shock and awe’ policy entailed a rejection of any real sense of proportionality as well as of the sanctity of non-combatants. Furthermore, the US state did not have clear authority to commence military action in Iraq in the face of opposition by the UN (unlike the US-led action in Afghanistan which was UN backed).

The coalition of the willing side-stepped many of these worries by replacing the traditional just war doctrine with what has come to be called ‘the Bush doctrine’, according to which the US has the right unilaterally to conduct preventive action including preventive military action. Bush made this very clear in his now famous speech to the graduates of West Point military academy on 1 June 2002:

> The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. [Applause.] In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act. [Applause.] . . . our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives. [Applause.] (Bush, 2002a)²

In a final divergence from traditional just war theory, far from simply pursuing peace, it seems clear that several other goals also underlie current US foreign policy. These become more evident when one examines the origins of the Bush doctrine.

Despite the subsequent attempts of some neo-conservatives to distance themselves from the disastrous policy over Iraq (Burrough et al., 2004; Rose, 2007), the Bush administration’s post-9/11 policy towards Afghanistan and
Iraq finds its roots in the concerns of certain US neo-conservative think-tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute and especially the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) (Bush, 2003). (I leave aside the question of the unity of neo-conservatism here, claiming merely that Bush adheres to a strand of the movement.) The PNAC’s 1997 ‘Statement of Principles’ boasts among its signatories Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Francis Fukuyama, Donald Kagan, Dan Quayle, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz (PNAC, 1997). Since its inception, the PNAC’s primary aim in lobbying the federal government has been to increase the US defence budget to a level that ‘would maintain American security and advance American interests in the new century’. The ‘Statement of Principles’ continues,

As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world’s pre-eminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests? (Ibid.)

Such solidly classical realist objectives are far from new in the international relations (IR) literature, of course. (The situation is rather different for structural realists.) Hans Morgenthau argued that every state has an innate tendency to be afraid of losing power relative to other states, through the latter’s deliberate strategies, changed circumstances, or the state’s own mistakes. For this reason, he argued, there is a perennial tendency for every state to try to increase its own standing and power relative to all other actors in the international system. Where a state achieves this goal, it will seek to strengthen its new position, possibly using diplomacy or war (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 228). The final section of the present chapter will show that neo-conservatives distance themselves from Morgenthau on other grounds (for example, Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 252–3). Yet, the PNAC has applied this reasoning vociferously to justify regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, in a letter to the Weekly Standard dated 28 September 1998, Robert Kagan (1998) urged the Clinton administration to use all necessary military force to support ‘the Wolfowitz plan’ (whereby the US would create and maintain a safe haven for indigenous anti-Ba’athist forces in southern Iraq) in order to counter the ‘imminent and devastating threat to American interests’ posed by Iraq’s alleged possession of so-called ‘weapons of mass destruction’. The PNAC kept up this type of pressure from its creation in 1997 until the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In fact, its primary goal in the Middle East has always been to transform Iraq from a rogue state into a good neighbour in international affairs (Schmitt, 2005; see also Chomsky, 2006). This accords with a clear tradition in US foreign policy, the central claim of which found canonical
expression in the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904, under the terms of which ‘in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine [of 1823] may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of . . . wrong doing or impotence [by other states], to the exercise of an international police power’ (Roosevelt, quoted in McCoubrey and Morris, 2000, pp. 102–3).

Since the Corollary was first stated, the great powers of the Old World have declined, the Soviet bloc has collapsed, technology has advanced, globalisation has intensified significantly and the US has rejected isolationism in favour of a new role as a global power. Together these factors have extended the US’s backyard (a notion central to the Monroe Doctrine) to the whole globe. The US state’s responsibilities and ambitions have expanded in line with its international pre-eminence. The PNAC has understood this for many years (PNAC, 1998).

America’s post-9/11 war policy grows straight out of this line of thinking. Reflecting its endorsement of PNAC neo-conservatism, a key priority of the Bush administration’s National Security Strategy for the United States of America, published in September 2002, is to repair failed states in order to protect US interests: ‘As humanitarian relief requirements are better understood, we must also be able to help build police forces, court systems, and legal codes, local and provincial government institutions, and electoral systems’ (White House, 2002, ch. 9). This document opens with the following statement of faith:

[We in the United States] seek . . . to create a balance of power that favours human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty . . . We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent. (Bush, 2002b)

The Bush administration will allow the Iraqi people to freely choose ‘lasting institutions of freedom’: in other words, liberal democratic free market capitalism (Bush, 2003; see also Chua, 2004; and Harvey, 2005, ‘Afterword’). In this way, the Ba’athist state will be replaced by a neo-conservative ideal of the state and a civil society in which individuals enjoy, in the words quoted above, ‘the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty’. The international system will thereby be stabilised and US interests protected (Brzezinski, 2004, esp. part 2). (Some neo-liberals disaggregate free markets from the rule of law and democracy, looking to the former to bring international stability but not moral homogeneity; see Lal, 2004.)

Many neo-conservatives have acknowledged a classical realist basis for ‘the war on terror’. Irving Kristol wrote in 2003, for example, that Thucydides’
**History of the Peloponnesian War** was ‘the favorite neo-conservative text on foreign affairs’ (Kristol, 2003, p. 35). Yet, the actual situation is not so straightforward (Kane, 2006). Famously and very influentially, Francis Fukuyama claimed Georg W.F. Hegel for the neo-conservative cause. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama argued that while all earlier political systems had contained ‘grave defects and irrationalities’, liberal democratic free market corporate capitalism had shown itself to be ‘free from such fundamental internal contradictions’ (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xi). In Bush’s words, there is only one ‘sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise’ (Bush, 2002b). This model represents, in short, ‘the end of History’. Fukuyama’s work, and especially his 2004 book *State Building*, is pivotal here in that it foregrounds a core element of the neo-conservative mission beyond that of the pursuit of the interests of US businesses and the US state pure and simple: this is the inherently moral goal of developing currently non-capitalist (one is tempted to say ‘barbarous’) peoples (Fukuyama, 2004). Moreover, even though Fukuyama gives a poor interpretation of Hegel (see Tyler, 2006, introduction, and ch. 1), his work does allow one to recognise certain structural similarities between his justification of neo-conservative liberal democratic capitalism and the analytic frameworks employed by certain mainstream IR theorists, as will become clear shortly.

### STATE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Robert H. Jackson (1990) has done much to popularise the distinction between states in the full sense (what I shall also call, the state as such, or the ideal state) on the one hand and ‘failed’ or ‘quasi-’ states on the other (see Lawler, 2005). The former possess both negative and positive sovereignty in that, first, they enjoy predominant domestic authority and equality with other states (‘juridical statehood’), and under normal conditions can enforce these claims (Jackson, 1990, p. 53). Second, they distribute the benefits attendant upon being governed by a state equitably to their members. Quasi-states, on the other hand, possess negative sovereignty alone: they enjoy the ‘formal-legal condition’ of being ‘only deemed to be substantial and capable’ in international law (ibid., pp. 27, 53). Their borders are respected in international law and they are accepted as members of the international system (are recognised in international negotiations, and so on). Quasi-states, however, lack positive sovereignty: they may not be endorsed by the domestic population and, by the standards of international law, they are institutionally immature. ‘Their governments are
often deficient in the political will, institutional authority, and organized power to protect human rights or provide socio-economic welfare’ (ibid., p. 21). (Note that the Ba’athist regime may not have been a ‘failed state’ as it lacked only political will.)

The former conception of ‘the state’ underpins most contemporary analyses of the international system: at least as an ideal type or theoretical extreme in relation to which actual states are characterised, analysed and sometimes assessed (Bosanquet, 1923, pp. xv–lxii and ch. 11; Nicholson, 1976; Review of International Studies, 2004). In this chapter, the concept of the ideal state as a person is used in this way: that is, as a critical heuristic device. (While I think it unlikely to happen in practice, I do not deny the possibility that an actual state could live up to the ideal of the state as such, under certain circumstances.)

The ideal state has many facets. First, it exists as a unified rational actor (or ‘person’) in the sense that it possesses a clear and coherent internal structure for the making and implementation of political decisions. This structure is constituted by a systematic demarcation of departments and agencies, each with their own functions, relative autonomy and authority. Hence, although different aspects of one state engage in particular activities domestically and in foreign affairs, to the extent that they form part of an ideal state, they do so in conscious recognition of these systematic demarcations. The ideal state can have as many identities as it has facets, yet there must be effective conventions and procedures in place to determine the relative priority of each facet. Unresolved disjunctions and conflicts between the actions and dictates of the various facets of a particular state either domestically or internationally are signs of that state’s failure to live up to its ideal. Ultimately, the state as such speaks and acts coherently. To the extent that a political unit fails to do so, it fails to be a state as such.

The state qua state possesses de facto domestic sovereignty over the inhabitants of its territory; that is, it exercises ultimate coercive power at home. Moreover, its will is complied with because it possesses this power, by a proportion of those inhabitants which is sufficient to secure a ‘reasonable’ level of social order (Ritchie, 1893). Furthermore, it is recognised by the appropriate international body or bodies as being able to promulgate and enforce its will over those inhabitants. Similarly, the state as such possesses de facto international sovereignty to the extent that it can exert its will in the international system. It possesses de jure sovereignty to the extent that it meets three further requirements. The first is that the domestic population recognises its rule over them as being legitimate. The second is that the domestic criminal justice system recognises the legislature and executive as being constitutionally entitled to issue authoritative commands.
which it (the criminal justice system) should enforce. The third is that the state is recognised by the appropriate international body or bodies as being entitled to represent its inhabitants and pursue its perception of their interests in the international system. Full sovereignty exists only to the extent that the same entity enjoys both *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty. Thus conceived, statehood as a form of personhood is a matter of degree, not least because ‘like all other human organizations states are conditional on leadership, cooperation, knowledge, resources, fortune, and much else. Absolute power is an impossibility’ (Jackson, 1990, p. 53).

The internal structure of statehood has direct and dramatic consequences for the current international system. First, the centrality of recognition to both *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty ensures that every encounter that a state has in the international system, no matter how routine, tends to either reaffirm or undermine its standing as a state. After the embarrassment of 9/11 (for it was that as well as much else), the Bush administration needed to reassert the authority of the US state in the international system and it chose to try to do this by prosecuting the ‘war on terror’ and particularly by high profile and vigorous military action in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Second, domestic political imperatives – especially the need for the administration to regain its standing with the US electorate – created a clear need for the administration to be seen to mete out retribution to some definite group that was perceived to bear significant responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, or at least could be made to do so.

This much is fairly obvious. Yet, a less apparent but significant problem confronts anyone who attempts to use a static, ahistorical conception of juridical and quasi-juridical recognition of the static sovereign state of the type outlined above, to understand the implications of ‘the war on terror’. Writing in the context of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, the political economist Robert Cox has observed that ‘[a]ny fixed definition of the content of the concept “civil society” would just freeze a particular moment in history and privilege the relations of social forces then prevailing’ (Cox, 1999, p. 98; see also Bieler and Morton, 2004). Cox’s contention also obtains for ‘the state’. Theories which effectively reduce international relations to the interaction of independent states are simpliceminded in that they have ‘too few thoughts and feelings to match the world as it really is’ (adapting Williams, 1973, p. 149).

Given that ‘the demands of political reality and the complexities of political thought are obstinately what they are’ (ibid., p. 150), it is helpful to reconsider neo-conservatism in the wider interpretative context offered by theories of intersubjective recognition, employed by, for example, philosophical idealists, constructivists, English school theorists and critical theorists. From this more rounded and insightful cluster of perspectives, in
addition to the undeniable considerations of enlightened self-interest, international society necessarily presupposes conventions, norms and laws that are for the most part routinely obeyed by states for irreducibly normative reasons. Such scholars reject the realist claim that the origins of a state’s interests should be of little concern for international actors or to students of international affairs. On this view, there is no determinate identity which a state possesses prior to the ongoing processes of articulation and response entailed by its iterative interactions with other states and non-state actors.

An agent’s identity and therefore its actions are intimately connected to the normative and ideational features of its existence, and not least the agent’s sense of its own place and proper role within international society (Morris, 2005). In addition to holding true for bilateral relations, this applies at the global level (in relation, for example, to the UN), at the regional level (for example, the European Union: EU; and the African Union: AU), and the domestic level (for example, in relation to domestic non-governmental groups that monitor their government’s foreign policies). This link between structure and identity extends even to the state’s relations to terrorist organisations. Such considerations have momentous practical as well as theoretical implications. For example, Christian Reus-Smit (2005, p. 196) attributes to them the differences between the US’s relations with Canada on one hand and Cuba on the other.

The dynamic between actor and system is not one-way, however. Structures do exert significant influences over the identities of actors, yet they cannot exist apart from the particular actions, interactions and intentions of particular actors. Moreover, this relational ontology helps to reinforce the authority of the particular elements, and changes in the agents’ respective constituent meanings and values alter the nature of the system/society considered as a whole. Obviously there will be degrees of depth and specificity to these relations. Between an international society with thick and robust bonds and an international system based on the minimal structures required for communication and interaction, exists a hinterland in which, as Hedley Bull once put it,

A sense of common interests is tentative and inchoate; where the common rules perceived are vague and ill-formed, and there is doubt as to whether they are worthy of the name of rules; or where common institutions – relating to diplomatic machinery or to limitations in war – are implicit or embryonic. (Bull, 1977, p. 15)

The expressive languages that help to determine such allegiances and animosities are found, for example, in the terms in which treaties are made and wars conducted (Hegel, 1821, secs 332 and 76A). The limits placed on
the conduct of war, for example, by the Geneva Conventions presuppose certain things about those affected, whether they are individual combatants or civilians (namely, that they are to be treated with respect). Such languages help to constitute the concrete nature of a state’s sovereignty, because they constitute the fields of meanings and values in which occur the multifaceted and inherently relational processes of judgement and international recognition which constitute the core identity of the state. These relations are based in praxis then: that is, in the communicative structure of one’s particular deliberate actions. There is no realm of intentional practice which does not presuppose ‘theoretical’ claims and judgements to some degree, and the presuppositions of one’s practices have significant consequences in intra- and inter-state relations.

Famously, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye have stressed what they call the ‘complex interdependence’ of actors in the international system. They argue that contemporary IR is characterised by multifaceted reciprocal dependences between state and non-state actors (Keohane and Nye, 1977, p. 8; Ben-Porat, 2005). There are three key features of such a situation: first, actors interrelate through various routes (‘ interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational relations’); second, the relevant actors interact over ‘multiple issues that are not arranged in a clear or consistent hierarchy’; and third, military force is used only against governments external to one’s ‘region’ (Keohane and Nye, 1977, pp. 25–6). Complex interdependence links power to issue areas, such that an actor whose will tends to predominate in one area may be relatively weak in others. A large corporation may be very important in trade policy but have little influence over a state’s decision to go to war. (Sometimes corporations play very significant roles in both areas, of course.)

At any one time, each participant acts in many spheres, and, even though Keohane and Nye neglect this fact, each therefore possesses a multifaceted and fluctuating self-identity. The State Department may understand ‘the US’ and its interests in one way, the Central Intelligence Agency understand them in another, the White House in a third and so on. Consequently, at any one time, these various facets of the actor’s self-identity may be in tension if not outright conflict with each other. This means that the actor rarely lives up to the ideal of unity in final action which was noted earlier as the first essential characteristic of a sovereign identity (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20).

This is not to say that there are no centrifugal forces to the actors’ identities. The most notable are found in being part of a common tradition, being within the same ‘communities of fate’, being subject to common international institutions, and being subject to the exercise of power (Falk, 1999). In regard to the first of these, only very rarely are states created de novo. Rarely does a new generation of citizens create its state anew and nor
do administrations (Mao, Pol Pot and possibly Hitler are exceptions). They build on traditions that have been formed and gradually re-formed intersubjectively over decades and often centuries. For example, ‘new’ states owe much to the preceding colonial traditions and any internal antagonisms between the groups brought under the new political system. Nigeria is a case in point here (Meredith, 2005, pp. 193–205, 574–87). Crucially, state identities are articulated and stabilised by the tendency of iterative interactions between actors to transform the international system of which they are parts into an international society. (For analyses of this process in the domestic context, see Rawls, 1993, lecture 4, esp. sec. 7 and lecture 6; d’Agostino, 1996.) Second, the development of issues and crises that do not respect current political boundaries has created what have been called international ‘communities of fate’ (Held et al., 1999, pp. 444–9). Most pressing here are drugs, AIDS, climate change and environmental degradation, none of which can be solved within traditional state-based structures (see Cammack, 2006). The subsequent efforts to address such issues require actors to redefine themselves – and especially their core powers, interests and values – more clearly.

Frequently, however, none of these is a strong source of unity when taken on its own. First, as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued (1985, p. 223), ‘Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict’, and thereby have a tendency to disintegrate. Usually, there are also other significant countervailing pressures: most obviously, changing circumstances but also the multiplicity of spheres acted in by an actor’s various facets. Second, communities of fate tend to have blurred and porous boundaries, making them fluid and subject to jockeying for advantage between groups. It is for this reason that states have looked to international institutions to provide stability. Yet, for much of the world international institutions are, in many senses, a ‘precious bane’ (Milton, 1667, bk 1, l.690–9). They foster the semblance of peace and order that some countries have struggled for centuries to bring about domestically, and do so in a relatively short time. Yet, due to their reliance on asymmetries of power between the actors which make them up, of necessity they do so only imperfectly and with more than a tinge of injustice. The ambiguous character of international institutions is central to my analysis of the effects of the ‘war on terror’ on the future of international society, as will become clear now.

**INSTITUTIONS AND POWER**

Keohane and Nye see international organisations as playing a crucial role in the orderly functioning of the international system under conditions of
complex interdependence. Keohane distinguishes three main institutional
types, running from full articulacy and enforcement through international
law, to customary manners of behaviour. He calls these ‘Formal intergov-
ernmental or cross-national non-governmental organizations’ such as the
UN, the EU or the AU, ‘international regimes’ such as the Bretton Woods
regime, and ‘conventions [which underlie] informal institutions, with rules
and understandings that shape the expectations of actors’ (Keohane, 1988,
pp. 3–4). In the philosophical idealist Bernard Bosanquet’s terms, every
institution is an external manifestation (‘fact’) of sets of meanings and
values (‘ideas’) which are arranged so as to facilitate the performance of a
social function (‘purpose’) (Bosanquet, 1923, ch. 11; see also pp. xv–lxii).
Reflecting this structure, for Keohane (1988, pp. 4–5), the strength of every
institution is a function of three things. The first is ‘commonality’, or
shared hermeneutic frameworks (ideas) within which actors develop criti-
cal expectations and interpret the actions of others. The second is
‘specificity’, the extent to which such expectations and modes of interpret-
ation are formally articulated in norms, rules and laws (the extent to which
they are facts and purposes). The third is ‘autonomy’, or the degree of
control that an institution has over determination of the norms, rules and
laws that frame its actions.

Keohane and Nye summarise the roles of international organisations
in the following way: ‘Organizations will set agendas, induce coalition-
formation, and act as arenas for political action by weak states. Ability to
choose the organizational forum for an issue and to mobilize votes will be
an important political resource’ (Keohane and Nye, 1977, p. 37). Keohane
can be seen as developing further this aspect of complex interdependence,
when he observed elsewhere that, ‘the ability of states’ – and here one might
add all other actors in a scheme of complex interdependence – ‘to commu-
nicate and cooperate depends on human-constructed institutions, which
vary historically and across issues, in nature (with respect to the policies
they incorporate) and in strength (in terms of the degree to which their
rules are clearly specified and routinely obeyed)’ (Keohane, 1988, p. 2).

Keohane and Nye wrongly regard concrete interests as prior to recogni-
tion (Wendt, 1992). When one remembers the previous discussion of iden-
tity formation, however, it can be seen that key international institutions are
not merely superficial mechanisms through which states and non-state
actors can pursue pre-existing interests. They help to structure the actors’
multiple identities. More fundamentally, an actor’s self-image, interests and
therefore actions are partly determined by its sense of its actual place in the
international society. Martha Finnemore and Stephen Toope (2001, p. 743;
quoted in Reus-Smit, 2004, p. 3) have characterised international law, for
example, as ‘a broad social phenomenon deeply embedded in the practices,
beliefs, and traditions of societies, and shaped by interaction among societies’. Starting from a similar point, other scholars have debated the ‘Americanization’ of international law (Keleman et al., 2004, 2005; Levi-Faur, 2005). Similarly, Edward Mansfield and Jon Pevehouse (2006) have highlighted the democratising pressures arising from joining international organisations, while Arturo Santa-Cruz (2005) has highlighted the effect of institutional election monitoring on notions of state sovereignty (see also Zün and Checkel, 2005). In these and other ways, when functioning at their best, organisations transform an international system based on enlightened self-interest and state power, into an international society based on shared norms of right and just behaviour.

Yet, most institutions are not ‘natural’ or automatically generated products of an organic international society. Instead, they are more or less consciously designed answers to such problems as the lack of trust or coordination between international actors. Moreover, it is very rare for the ‘dialogue’ that produces the commonality and specificity of international institutions to be a dialogue between equals. Often, they represent the articulation of arrangements and understandings already implicit within relations between actors, but even then the processes of articulating these norms are characterised by asymmetries of power (Hurrell, 2001; Foot et al., 2003; Morris, 2005; and Lee, this volume, chs 8 and 9). Many are created deliberately by the powerful, and usually to serve their own interests. Hence, international society contains hierarchies of authority arising from asymmetries of power. This has a number of consequences. First and most obviously, it blurs the distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty, in that which body is to count as authoritative (the *de jure* concern) is in large part determined by the prior exercise of power (the *de facto* concern). The UN, the US and the People’s Republic of China carry the day in the international non-recognition of the Taiwanese state in large part because they are more powerful, and not because they make a clearer or inherently more compelling normative case than those seeking recognition of Taiwan. Similarly, the former colonial states of the Middle East are recognised as discrete states by the UN, the US and in the system of international law which the UN and the US authorise. Yet, many individuals place far more significance on the notion of an Islamic/Arabic people in at least some of these states. Israel is recognised as an independent sovereign state (even if its precise borders are disputed) because the UN and importantly the US state and international law recognise it as such. Nevertheless, many actors do not recognise its legitimacy, and some including the Abu Nidal Organisation, Hizballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad-Shaqaqi and of course al-Qaeda seek its overthrow (Home Office, 2006). This has substantive effects on the status of fighters from outside Iraq’s borders, for example.
Are they interlopers or loyal participants in an Arabian military force? This question cannot be answered without presupposing certain normative judgements.

Ultimately, determining which bodies possess the moral authority to recognise an actor in the international system or society is an inherently normative matter rather than an empirical one (Goddard, 2006). Consequently, the mere fact of current institutional recognition does not and cannot by itself add moral weight to an agent’s claims or even existence over that of any other, because one must first justify the authority of the recognising body (the UN, the US and so on) (see Edkins and Zehfuss, 2005). A Zionist’s understanding of the state of Israel as the legitimate political manifestation of the Jewish homeland ordained by God has in itself no greater validity than a Palestinian’s understanding of Israel as a legally sanctioned terrorist fiction, despite the fact of Israel’s official recognition by the UN and most Western states. The idea that there is some neutral perspective or procedure that determines the ‘objectively correct’ (or ‘scientific’) position is a fiction which serves, sometimes consciously, to stifle fundamental debates about power and representation in IR.

A ‘FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE’: TALKING AMERICA’S LANGUAGE

Francis Fukuyama has claimed that ‘Americans’ believe that ‘legitimacy at an international level’ ‘is rooted in the will of democratic majorities in constitutional nation-states and Europeans . . . [tend] to believe it is based on principles of justice higher than the laws of wills of particular nation states’ (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 155). These assertions may fly in the face of recent evidence, yet, this contrast between praxis and moral universalism is an important one. It has been argued already that international institutions are required in order to stabilise and authorise the meanings and values underlying relations between actors in the international system. In this way, they help to build and sustain effective frameworks of communication and coordination between international actors.

Yet, these meanings and values tend either to become caricatures of their original selves, or to ossify into prejudices and dogma. (Witness the extension of the constitutional right of US citizens to bear arms from the nuanced need to provide a militia, to the current almost blanket permission to carry arms. Similarly, the Organization of African Unity was replaced by the AU when the former became a caricature of its founding principles.) Meanings and values avoid such fates only through the need to respond to new circumstances, the manipulation by large corporations and significant
international powers and their ilk, or as reactions to appalling and spectacular acts of violence by state or non-state actors. The clash between the two tendencies inherent in institutions (vitality and articulation) is the tragedy of international order. It is the clash of right against right, of the need for the accommodation of the demands of praxis on the one hand and the need for authoritative formulation on the other (Bradley, 1909).

Deepak Lal (2004, pp. 203–4; 2005) is scathing about the efficacy of manipulating institutions to bring peace and about their tendency to impose a single cultural model. Usually, he need not worry too greatly. Rarely are individual actors sufficiently unified to achieve such coherent and deliberate wholesale change of the significant parts of the ideational structure of institutional institutions. Nevertheless, in exceptional circumstances and if it is sufficiently well-positioned and strong-willed, one branch of a key actor can dominate the others internally. In such circumstances, deliberate manipulation of the structure of international society becomes a realistic option. This has been the case in the US for several years since September 11, 2001. The executive branch gained effective control, and directed the reaction of every other significant arm of the US state as well as the bulk of the voting population using the notion of a ‘war on terror’. (The US Supreme Court’s recent rulings on the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay offer hope that this control may be waning, as do the 2006 congressional elections.) Indeed, it is unsurprising that this idea has been particularly effective at galvanising popular support, given that it combines security concerns, a moral vision, and the sense of superiority that will always tend to inspire the citizens of the superpower, especially where there is a widespread domestic belief in manifest destiny. (President William Taft claimed once: ‘The day is not far distant when three Stars and Stripes at three equidistant points will mark our territory: one at the North Pole, another at the Panama Canal, and the third at the South Pole. The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it already is ours morally’, (quoted in McCoubrey and Morris, 2000, p. 102).

A number of factors worked in the US executive’s favour in this regard. First, in the aftermath of 9/11, the US people were suffering and continue to suffer a collective existential crisis (Richardson, 2006, p. 175; Connelly, 2005). This manifests itself as a profound sense of the US’s vulnerability to people who previously the population had tended to regard as too poor, disorganised and, for many, too uncivilised to inflict significant harm on their hegemonic country. They came to realise that rather than improving America’s security, its hegemonic position made it the prime target for disaffected groups. The shock was especially acute as the terrorists had used asymmetric warfare so effectively to defile two of the most potent symbols
of US wealth and power, the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, and had done so with a significant loss of life. Moreover, the attacks shocked those who sincerely believed and still believe in America’s world-historical importance (those who hold that, if spread, the ‘American way’ will bring freedom to all: ‘These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society’; Bush, 2002b; see also Bush, 2002a). In this regard, what one leading scholar has called the ‘Gothic’ event of 9/11 (Devetak, 2005) has been answered by a myth of a war on ‘terror’ which serves to express and thereby to reaffirm the authority of basic American values to the American people themselves (an example of ‘symbolic nonacquiescence’ (Feinberg, 1994, pp. 78–9).

Given these existential dimensions to the attacks, obvious US oil interests in controlling Iraq (interests that are acknowledged by the Bush administration and the oil corporations themselves) and the ongoing Halliburton scandals should not blind us to the neo-conservative mission to ‘liberate’ Iraq and other ‘underdeveloped’ countries, a contemporary rather harsher Wilsonianism. I do not propose to analyse this morality in any depth, not least because of the publication of an excellent book on the subject by Peter Singer (2004; see also Mansfield, 2004; Pryce, 2006). What is important, however, is to trace out some of the wider implications of the way in which Bush believes that he comes to know the requirements of the coalition’s moral mission.

We saw earlier that Bush was explicit in the 2002 *National Security Strategy* that, in practice, ‘liberation’ means fostering – using force if necessary – the only ‘sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise’ (Bush, 2002b; see further Lee, this volume, chs 8 and 9). In the West Point speech, Bush revelled in the crudity of his own moral universalism:

Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. [Applause.] Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities. [Applause.] Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. . . . There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent and the guilty. We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name. [Applause.] . . . America has a greater objective than controlling threats and containing resentment. We will work for a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror. (Bush, 2002a; see also Bush, 2001)

This is God’s plan for the world: ‘Freedom is the Almighty’s gift to every man and woman in this world . . . as the greatest power on earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom’ (Bush, address to the nation 13 April 2004, quoted in Harvey, 2005, p. 214). This reflects the fact that
Bush operates in a divinely ordained, Christian, monistic universe of eternal and ultimate values, to which he has direct access through conscience. In this sense, it is correct to describe the war on terror as ‘a faith-based initiative’ (Suskind, 2004).

This theocratic, monistic and, importantly, univocal vision of diplomatic wisdom distorts the more careful and nuanced processes of recognition which, it was argued earlier, usually underlie international society. (While the latter processes are very far from perfect or just, at least they tend to be tempered by an acceptance of the need for some political and military humility.) First, it engenders a dangerously paternalistic attitude towards those without a direct line to God. Practically, for example, it supports the notion that, in Hegel’s words (1821, sec. 351), ‘The civilized nation is conscious that the rights of barbarians are unequal to its own and treats their autonomy as only a formality’. Second, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has observed (2004, p. 215; see also pp. 215–16), it is likely to be self-defeating, with the US being seen as ‘self-absorbed and . . . anti-American ideologies will gain international credence by labelling the United States as a self-appointed vigilante’.

The problem is not that Bush is motivated by simple self-interest, but that he is also guided by his particular form of moral universalism. It is significant, given what was noted in the second section, that even though many classical realists were committed Christians in their personal lives, they were very careful to warn against allowing faith to influence the foreign policies of states. The fifth of Hans Morgenthau’s ‘six principles of political realism’ is emphatic on this point: ‘There is a world of difference between the belief that all nations stand under the judgement of God, inscrutable to the human mind, and the blasphemous conviction that God is always on one’s side and that what one wills oneself cannot fail to be willed by God also’ (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 13). This message recurred throughout Morgenthau’s writings, just as it did in the works of Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Butterfield. In fact, in 1954, Butterfield (1954, p. 96) attacked explicitly the notion of a ‘war of righteousness’ on the ground that one could never choose to end such a war, given that ‘it soon becomes a sin to compromise’ or even to disagree with judgements of the spiritual–military elite.

This thought takes on a special significance when one accepts the relational nature of identity set out above. From that perspective, even if one views the other participants in one’s dialogue simply as enemies one must still at least see them as actors to be answered (Duff, 1986, p. 238). Necessarily implied in that perception of their agency is some recognition of their ‘being a person like us’: that is, some recognition of their status as a rational agent whom one can reform, or even with whom one can, at least
in principle, compromise. If one demonises the enemy as has happened in the war on terror on the other hand, then there can be no recognition of status and legitimacy. It is for this reason that the war on terror is precluded from communicating US disapproval to the terror network. It cannot do this first, because that network is not part of America’s discursive community (the Western-authorised international society). Second, communication is impossible because the network lacks unity and definition, and thereby lacks personality (it is an idea more than an organisation). Third, the indeterminacy of al-Qaeda’s command ‘structure’ means that there is no head, not even Bin Laden himself, who is competent to negotiate a ceasefire and authorised to declare it. America cannot win the ‘war on terror’ within the latter’s current terms. Moreover, it is not even acceptable to try merely to control those demonised groups and individuals as one would an aggressive dog, because a demonised ‘other’ is necessarily seen as malevolent – it is simply the manifestation of evil. The only option is to seek to end their existence (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 5–6). Butterfield concludes, ‘it is wiser not to be responsible for introducing a deep and permanent irreconcilability into the . . . [international] order’. I trace out some of the far-reaching political effects of demonising one’s enemy elsewhere in this volume.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has used strands of IR theory to show that international actors gain concrete identities from their interactions, many of which take place through institutionalised processes. Even though these interactions are framed by asymmetries of power, for the most part no one actor has the unity of purpose to shape identities deliberately. Yet, the current ‘war on terror’ allowed the Bush administration to gain the moral high-ground at home and so in the international community, at least temporarily. Hence, if a world-historical individual does exist at present, then it is George W. Bush, someone whose ‘whole nature’ is ‘nought else but their masterpassion’ (Hegel, 1832, p. 31). Several commentators have argued that if the US continues to prosecute the ‘war on terror’, then the terroristic response of the US state will foster the collapse of the American ‘empire’ itself (Soros, 2004, ch. 2; Ferguson, 2005). If this is correct, then far from us reaching Fukuyama’s ‘end of History’, we are approaching the fall of yet another world-historical nation.

Yet, ultimately one would do well to question the power of what Bush’s senior advisor called at the start of this chapter, ‘History’s actors’. The insights gained from IR theory highlight the fact that recognition tends
very strongly to be diffuse and multifaceted, and each of its processes has a discrete momentum. The Bush administration seems to be losing the upper hand as US courts decide against the treatment of fighters captured in Iraq, US deaths mount, and the war becomes more expensive in financial and diplomatic terms. It seems also that the November 2006 congressional elections have changed the domestic political balance against them very significantly. As neo-conservative forces also lose internal focus and impetus, it is likely that the traditions of recognition within international society will reassert something like their former predominance in key areas (for different opposing views, see Kennedy-Pipe and Renegger, 2006; Mead, 2006; Wheeler and Morris, 2006). The conclusion of Bush’s second administration in 2008 should then mark merely the formal end of a policy that has already run out of steam. Nevertheless, the international society that remains will bear the scars as well as the inscriptions of the conflicts and policies that the Bush administration has pursued since 11 September 2001.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Matt Beech, Tom Kane, Justin Morris, Noël O’Sullivan, Claire Thomas, Pip Tyler and Richard Woodward, for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

2. Bush’s use of the term ‘pre-emption’ rather than ‘prevention’ is misleading as in international law the former requires the threat to be far more imminent and certain than he claims. Regarding the British case, see McLean and Patterson, 2006. The EU adopted the same position subsequently (European Commission, 2006).

3. For Hegel (1821, sec. 351) (and apparently Bush and Blair), nations are ‘barbarous’ to the extent that they ‘lag behind [the more advanced nations] in institutions which are essential moments [sc. facets] of the state’ (see Tyler, 2006, pp. 46–8).

4. ‘A neutral sanction would treat offenders and potential offenders much as beasts in a circus, as creatures which must be conditioned, intimidated, or restrained’ (von Hirsch, 1999, p. 69).

5. Butterfield (1954, p. 96). Butterfield referred to ‘the European order’. He even argued: ‘It is better to say that you are fighting for Persian oil than to talk of a “war of righteousness”, when you merely mean that you believe you have a right to the oil; for you would be conducting an altogether unjust war if for a single moment you believed anything less than this’ (p. 96).

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