De Amerikaanse identiteit en strategievorming: de invloed van culturele waarden tijdens de aanloop en het verloop van de War on terror

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9 America’s National Cultural Identity and the Strategic Decision-making Process: The Run-up to and Course of the War on Terror

9.1 English Summary and Conclusions

In researching my proposition that America’s cultural value system played an important role in the development, planning, legitimisation and ultimate implementation of America’s strategic policy during the run-up to and course of the war on terror, I first looked for a theoretical basis. Initially I concentrated on theories concerning strategy, then turned my attention to theories on culture as the expression of a value system forming the basis of social action.

None of the disciplines concerned – including military science, organisational studies and the study of international relations – uses a clear definition of strategy. There are authors who assume that strategy is devised and planned by no more than a few actors. These actors set out a plan, or plans, based on a certain vision of the objectives of the strategy, acquire resources and facilitate the implementation of the policy, which has been explicitly described. The first assumption in this approach is that the strategists rationally devise and plan a consistent vision for their grand strategy and that, in weighing up the arguments, they have access to all the necessary facts. Great confidence is placed in the potential for understanding the situation through research and analysis. The second assumption is that, once the plans have been thought out, everybody will be behind them. They can then be put into practice in a linear and sequential way. Deviation from or adjustments to plans once adopted are seen as a sign of weakness. Thirdly, it is assumed that strategy is taken to mean ideas concerning policy goals and the plans associated with them. The actual implementation of the policy is an operational matter. It is not part of the strategy, and if implementation of the plans goes wrong, it is not because of the strategists’ vision, or the plans, or the resources used. The fault lies in the implementation.

These views have been brought into question in all three of the disciplines mentioned above, however. In military science, for example, it has been found that in antiquity no such sharp distinction was drawn between thinking and doing. This developed only as the art of war became more complex, and the influence of logistics and technology gained in importance. Interestingly, it was above all in the American tradition that the division between thinking and doing came to dominate military science. The literature presents a number of reasons for this. After the War of Independence, the United States had virtually no standing army. The militias who were responsible for defending the country were not only poorly trained, they were also largely beyond the control of the state. There was a fear that, with such a poorly led army, the United States could be defeated by any enemy. The second reason for establishing a national army was to provide an opportunity to reinforce the young nation’s foreign policy objectives. The third reason for seeking more control over the
army was that the lack of top-down direction left scope for officers to undertake their own initiatives, and conduct their own private wars. This fear that things might go completely wrong was vindicated when, in 1872, General Custer – on his own initiative – engaged in battle with a group of Native Americans, and died alongside his men at the famous Battle of Little Big Horn. After this battle, the public demanded that such a thing should never happen again, and that the enemy must be destroyed with whatever means possible before he himself had a chance to strike. The Americans were able to apply top-down strategies and deploy all the necessary means to defeat their enemy in the wars of the twentieth century thanks to their growing economic and technological superiority.

The legacy of America’s thinking on strategy that came to dominate military science can also be seen in the initial approaches to strategy predominant in organisational theory in the United States in the early 1960s. From roughly the mid-1960s onwards, however, other schools of thought emerged, and these ideas were overturned. For example, it was noted that many deliberate plans were never actually implemented or, if they were, turned out to be unsuccessful. The new thinking did not, however, place the blame for this failure of strategic planning on the shoulders of the ‘ground troops’. The impossibility of maintaining full control over the definition and implementation of plans was highlighted. Some, for example, observed that the necessary information was not always available, or not always available at the right moment. Furthermore, information was often inaccurate and, even more devastatingly, ‘infallible’ leaders sometimes made errors of judgment, or took decisions on irrational grounds.

Many plans were not therefore implemented in the smooth, linear and sequential fashion envisaged on paper. This was due largely to the changing context, which proved much more unpredictable, and necessitated much greater modifications to plans, than had initially been thought. Furthermore, in many cases, it proved impossible to get everyone pulling in the same direction, either in the development and planning of strategy or in its implementation. On the contrary: differences of opinion as to where policy should lead and the underlying conflicts of interest turned out to be more the rule than the exception.

Finally, two new ideas emerged which have had a particularly important bearing on my research. A growing band of authors distanced themselves from the idea that thinking on strategy and its implementation can be so clearly separated. They believe that the success of strategy depends to a large extent not only on the ideas that come from the top of an organisation, but above all on implementation at ground level. Accordingly, to ensure success, it is not simply a matter of deploying these resources; strong support within the organisation is in fact a prerequisite for the successful implementation of a strategy. Some authors go so far as to say that support within an organisation is responsible for its value system or culture, and that the process whereby strategy becomes manifest can in fact be equated to the way in which a culture manifests itself in an organisation. Culture gives rise to adaptation to external circumstances, while at the same time ensuring the necessary internal integration, and strategy is no different.
One point that makes this link between culture and strategy particularly interesting in the context of my research is that, as studies have shown, cultural values within organisations correlate to a great extent with the cultural value system that manifests itself at national level.

In my analysis of the theories that have emerged from the study of international relations, I focused on four approaches: realism/neorealism, the neoliberal institutional school, neomarxism and, finally, the approach known as social constructivism.

Realism arose in the interwar years of the twentieth century. It is based on the principle that anarchy, egocentrism, and the conflicts and battles they spawn result from the absence of a monopoly on power in international relations. The only way for a state to guarantee its security is either to achieve total hegemony, or to establish a balance of power. History shows that the first option is virtually impossible, however. There will always be forces that resist the hegemony of a state, dooming all such attempts to failure. Which leaves only the second option, striking a balance between the country’s security and the maximisation of its interests – acquiring more land, for example, or exploiting economic opportunity. According to the realists, no single state can dodge the game. Failure to participate means that there is no one to represent the national interest, leaving the nation prey to other states.

According to those who espouse realism, the answer to the question of who is the strategist is clear: the strategist is a statesman (or statesmen) striving for objective goals in the interests of a unified national government.

Realism also posits that the strategic process occurs according to a fixed pattern, whereby clear objective goals and associated strategic options are defined. The goals and the strategies are then compared to alternatives, and the costs and benefits of each scenario compared in order to select the best option, which is then implemented.

The realists are not only clear as to who is the actor in the process of strategic thought and action, they are also clear as to what interests underlie strategy. These are seen as the national interest, the substance of which is believed to emerge from a democratic process. The state has a mandate to defend those interests to the best of its ability. The question of how those interests are defined, and whether there is any debate or conflict over their substance is not, however, considered. This is not within the scope of the study of international relations, according to the realists.

The neoliberal approach is based on the premise that supranational institutions can be set up to allow states to arrive at the same type of order, based on binding agreements, as that which they have achieved at national level. This thinking is based on the ideas of Enlightenment philosopher John Locke, who argued that people are capable of voluntarily creating a just society. The realists, on the other hand, follow the ideas of political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who said that, in human relations, only power and deterrence can lead to predominance or balance.

The dispute between the realists and the neoliberals is not so heated as it might appear, however. Both these approaches assume that, in weighing up the national interests, net gain and loss can be compared, and that the gain or loss will be to the
benefit or cost of the unified state. The difference is that, where realists see problems, the neoliberals see opportunities.

Nevertheless, the neoliberal approach to international relations does make two interesting assumptions. One is that moral values are the driving force behind policy objectives. The other is that such values are shared by different states. For example, the neoliberals believe that states that set great store by democratic, liberal principles will, for that very reason, not end up at war with each other. As such, the neoliberals come close to the idea of shared value systems and national cultural identity as a starting point for strategic policy goals.

The realist and neoliberal approaches leave us with a number of questions, however. They leave open the question of whose interests we are talking about when we refer to ‘national interests’. Nor do they provide a definitive answer as to who should be regarded as actors and how the process of defining the national interest comes about.

The neomarxist approach, on the other hand, is overtly concerned with the conflicts of interests between various actors both within and between nations. The neomarxist tradition does not take the class struggle as the root of these conflicts, but the conflicting interests that arise between the different national and international fractions of capital in the distribution of added value. The neomarxists therefore regard the process of strategic decision-making as a battle for hegemony between these fractions, or regimes, of capital. The fraction or coalition of fractions that enjoys hegemony can set out plans and attempt to execute them. These regimes are not constrained by national interests. Shared and conflicting interests exist across borders, leading to the formation of coalitions.

The realist, neoliberal and neomarxist models, however, leave little or no room to consider actions based on non-material interests and the value systems that underlie them. The principle of social constructivism fills this gap. According to this approach ‘who we are has implications for how we define our interests and how we attempt to achieve them through strategic decision-making’.

Social constructivists do not, incidentally, claim that ideas based on values are more important than material interests. They claim only that these interests must be guided and supported within the social context in which they are defined. This position sheds an entirely different light on the alleged conflict between the realist and neoliberal positions. The unworldly ‘moral values’ or ‘ideals’ of the neoliberals are simply the ‘ethics’ or ‘values’ that form part of a national identity. In this sense, foreign policy is the embodiment of those values. Values are not therefore separate from reality, they represent reality.

Who we are apparently does have implications for how we define our interests and how we attempt to achieve them through strategic decision-making. To find out who we are, we must consider our cultural value system. However, just as there is no agreement when it comes to material interests, value systems can also conflict. We thus have no clear definition of national interests either on the basis of agreed material interests or on
the basis of values. Devising and implementing a strategic policy is therefore always a process, the outcome of internal and external negotiations. This implies that we must relinquish the notion that strategy is fully planned, and can be implemented in a linear and sequential way.

Another consequence of exploring cultural identity as the driving force behind strategic decision-making is that, when it comes to the making of foreign policy – and defining the latitude for its implementation – we must always consider the support and legitimisation it derives from the base of society. The strategic decision-making process is thus not only a top-down affair it is also influenced from the bottom up.

There are dozens of definitions of culture in the literature. I have based my research on Edgar Schein’s definition, who says that culture must be seen as ‘a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems’. I have added to this the remark by Florence Kluckhohn that external problems are solved and internal integration created at ‘a particular point in time’. This remark is important, because it highlights the fact that different forces might have an interest in maintaining – or changing – a culture. I then turned to the different elements of this definition, examining them in further detail.

The first point to emerge in the definition is the fact that social action, which is partly determined by a pattern of cultural values, is always reserved for interaction within a group. In the literature, however, there is no agreement on the size of the group, or on the social context needed for the group to operate. The largest unit of culture identified in the literature is a ‘civilisation’. However, this idea overlooks the huge differences that exist within a particular geographical area. Furthermore, a civilisation has no legal, political or institutional basis for action. A civilisation has a largely ideological function, to warn us that ‘our’ value system is being attacked and that ‘we’ have the right to defend ourselves. We must not underestimate this last point, however, and we shall see that it certainly did play a role in the declaration and legitimisation of the war on terror.

The unit that does have political, legal and military institutions is the nation state. Many authors regard this unit as the bearer of cultural identity, their argument being that the political system is defined at this level, and that all kinds of administrative, legal and socialising systems are established at state level.

However, several things must be borne in mind when it comes to the idea that the nation state is equivalent to an unambiguous cultural value system. Firstly, this idea is based on the assumption that the nation is the same as the state. However, the concept of a ‘nation’ refers first and foremost to a perceived unit, what we in the Netherlands refer to as a volk or ‘people’. This feeling of being part of a people can transcend the nation state. It can also straddle borders in the absence of a nation state. Finally, the feeling of being part of a unit that excludes others can exist within a nation
state, with the result that individuals feel only partial, if any, unity with the overarching nation state.

The second point to consider is that culture does make sense at certain times. After all, the value system associated with a culture provides a blueprint for coping with external conditions, ensuring social cohesion. Here, Kluckhohn’s remark comes into its own: solutions derived from cultural values apply in certain situations. On the other hand, culture not only makes sense, it also gives meaning. People who are complete strangers to each other nevertheless feel a sense of affinity because they attribute the same values to things. The idea that culture confers meaning also implies that cultures exist due to the very fact that a group sets itself against other groups with different cultural value systems. The idea of excluding others creates a feeling of unity, but can also turn into ethnocentrism and out-and-out racism. The values of others are then regarded not only as inferior, but also as wrong and, in the most extreme circumstances, as something to be suppressed.

If culture makes sense and gives meaning, it must also adapt to change. One of the key points in the debate on core cultural values is how quickly they change. One group of authors argue that cultures were created long ago and that the patterns, norms, values, practices and other attributes that have become ingrained along the way are not likely to change in the short term.

Contrasting with this view is the idea that cultural values are subject to rapid change. The assumption here is that cultural patterns are stable when circumstances remain the same, but that any change in society will also impact on cultural values.

But how quickly do cultural patterns change? And what are the causes of such change? Besides economic growth, we can generally say that rapid social developments can usually be linked to adapted cultural patterns.

However, two factors militate against any change to the value system. The first lies in the fact there is also a point in preserving a culture – for certain groups at least. This power issue is often overlooked in debates on culture. As I see it, however, different groups exist within a nation state, and these groups all have their own cultural values. These deviations from the norm are reflected in the political agenda put forward by the various groups. Culture is therefore directly related to interests and power, and we have to consider what groups we can distinguish within a society, and the circumstances that lead a particular value system to become dominant.

Secondly, I have not only assumed a top-down approach. However relevant such an approach may be, it does not tell the entire story. People need stability and continuity, and this in itself naturally slows change. Another limitation of the top-down approach lies in the fact that it regards culture purely as the outcome of institutions set up by the ruling class, which serve the interests of, and are completely open to manipulation by the ruling class. However, it is at least as important to consider the fact that the cultural values of the lower social classes, or groups, also have an impact in a society or an organisation.
This bottom-up approach has been explored largely by anthropologists who are interested in the writing of history and the issue of power. According to this view, power is based in the final analysis on the support for the ‘meanings’ it provides, and this appeal to ‘meanings’ is simply an appeal to cultural sentiments.

Assuming that cultural values are apparently very important as a driving force for social action, and are therefore also crucial to the strategic decision-making process, I have suggested how we might study these cultural phenomena. However, while the top-down approach provides us with a concrete object of research – study of the elite, their objectives and how they express them – things are more complex when it comes to the bottom-up approach. This approach to cultural values places much more emphasis on the emergence of cultural value systems through the social action of groups at the bottom of society. Such groups rarely explicitly articulate their objectives. So I have been forced to focus on generalisations, and a large proportion of my analysis is based on attributing meaning to cultural phenomena.

The literature sets out a number of ways of categorising cultures. Various attempts have been made to define typologies of cultures based on the clustering of a number of cultural phenomena. However, for conceptual reasons, such categories are not appropriate for my study. They are much too broad and do not permit analysis of the conflicting forces at work within cultures. Anthropology and sociology, by contrast, have a long tradition of listing cultural core dimensions or dilemmas that every society attempts to address. The problem is that there is no definitive list. Furthermore, there are both universal core dimensions and culture-specific dimensions. A distinction is thus often drawn between the etic approach, based on universally occurring core dimensions, as opposed to the emic approach, which refers to culture-specific values.

I have attempted to find a middle way between the etic and emic approaches. For example, I have used basic assumptions mentioned in the literature, but only as an ordering principle. At the same time, I have tried to concretise these basic assumptions as much as possible by focusing on the historical context in which they emerged and occur. In my view, cultural dimensions are often difficult to tell apart precisely because they occur together in a pattern. I am resigned to the methodological problem presented by potential overlap between different dimensions. Indeed, I believe it is outweighed by the greater depth of analysis made possible by the specification and identification of points of agreement between the basic assumptions.

I also took a pragmatic approach, electing not to study all features of culture, not only because this is an impossible task, but also because it was not relevant to my research. I focused instead on those cultural phenomena that I believe played a role in the strategic decision-making process during the war on terror.

The first dimension I focused on in my research was individualism. This core dimension features the classic contrast between the individual asserting himself in various ways and the individual who is focused on the values of a group.
Secondly, I looked at the contrast between individualism and institutional collectivism. This is particularly interesting in the American context. It is not the individual who rejects the group consensus who is key here, but quite explicitly the individual who objects to government interference.

The third dimension on which I focused was universalism, which I believe affords a crucial insight into how political strategic decision-making is regarded in the American context.

The fourth dimension we must consider is the specific way of thinking about reality that is typical of America’s cultural identity.

The fifth dimension I considered is power distance, particularly the extent to which it is accepted, and how this is reflected in leadership culture in America.

The sixth dimension is action- and task-orientation versus relationship-orientation. This is closely related to the seventh dimension – achievement and acription – but I have accorded the latter its own separate role, precisely because it is a further specification of the dimensions power distance and individualism. Achievement is about doing and about appreciating one’s own performance, while acription is an expression of status attributed on the basis of origin.

The eighth dimension considered in my study is masculinity. I am particularly interested in how American society deals with violence.

The ninth considers how the American approach to uncertainty impacted on the decision-making process in the war on terror.

The tenth dimension on which I focused was time, considering how the way time is used affected the strategic decision-making process.

In the third part of my study I looked at the various theories on the emergence of America’s national cultural identity. These theories can roughly be divided into three main categories. Firstly, there are theories whereby the cultural identity of the Americans is a legacy of the value patterns brought to the New World by the first settlers from their home country or region. This hypothesis is referred to as the germ thesis, the main trend of which is what I call the White Anglo Saxon Protestant – or Wasp – thesis. This version holds that, of all the different value patterns taken to America, those of the white British Protestant settlers are dominant, and in fact laid the foundations of the country’s cultural identity.

This thesis is also based on the idea that the germs of the settlers from other ethnic backgrounds merged seamlessly with the cultural value pattern of the first British Protestant pioneers, certainly during the first two centuries after they settled there.

I looked first at the most radical version of the Wasp thesis, which claims that America’s cultural identity can be traced back largely to one particular British Protestant group that colonised the New World: the Puritans who settled mainly in the northeastern states, known as New England, between 1620 and 1640.

Secondly, I turned to the more nuanced version of the Wasp thesis, which also considers the subsequent waves of colonisation. The second wave of settlers, who headed mainly for Virginia, and to also what would later become North and South Carolina, arrived between 1642 and 1675. Their leaders were known as the ‘distressed
The third wave was the Quakers, who settled in what would later be New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania between 1675 and 1725. The fourth wave occurred between 1717 and 1775, when new settlers, mainly from northern England, Scotland and Ulster, arrived in the New World. The key feature of these colonists, who were in search of their own new country, was that they pushed on into previously unclaimed areas in already established states, including Virginia and New York state, or founded new states, like Kentucky, Tennessee and later Ohio and Indiana.

The extreme variant of the Wasp thesis, which holds that America’s cultural identity can be traced back to the Puritans of New England, has been very influential. Reference is for example made to the Puritans’ impact on the development of Christian worship in the United States and the cultural values associated with it. Many authors believe, moreover, that the influence of Puritan cultural values is not only limited to religious issues, but is found in all aspects of society. More specifically, much is made of the intellectual influence of the Puritans on the cultural identity of America.

However, the status of these first settlers must be put into perspective. The Plymouth Plantation, founded by the first Puritan settlers in 1620, was for a long time viewed by contemporaries and historians as only one of the many attempts – some successful, others less so – to establish a permanent settlement in what is now the United States. The influence of the second group of Puritans, who settled in Massachusetts between 1629 and 1640, under the leadership of John Wintrop, was in fact demonstrably greater, however. This is also clear from the literature. Even after other theses emerged in the twentieth century, and more revisionist approaches came to dominate in the 1950s, the Wasp thesis remained the view that generations of Americans learned from their school history books, that ‘America’s greatness is largely down to the white, mainly British Protestant settlers’. But the assumed dominant influence of the Massachusetts Puritans on the cultural identity of the United States is not all it seems. The literature reveals that there was no single form of Puritanism, the movement having in fact consisted of several subgroups, and that by no means everyone gave Wintrop and his followers their unconditional support.

Furthermore, there were many other settlers in New England who did not have overwhelmingly religious motives for starting a new life on a new continent. The ‘city upon the hill’ was certainly not a shining example of political unity. Quite the reverse, in fact.

For a long time, the influence of the settlers in the South on the creation of America’s cultural identity has been somewhat overlooked. In twentieth-century academic circles, the South, and particularly the attitudes of the South, represented the worst of the United States.

This image of the South as marginal or deviating from the norm needs some qualification, however. The first thing we should consider is that, certainly until the early
nineteenth century, the South was not regarded as such, and many of the founding fathers of the new nation actually came from the South.

What is more, we should not view the voluntaristic order of the Puritans as the norm, but rather the relative chaos in the southern state of Virginia. It was not the culture of the elite *distressed cavaliers* that determined the emerging cultural identity of the South, but rather the cultural patterns of the social underclasses.

Nor was it the aristocrats who saw to it that the Southern cultural identity spread west and southwest. The further we travel from the coast, the rougher the culture becomes. If we project the consequences of this onto the regional impact of the culture of the South, we must at any rate conclude that in the South and Southwest – with the exception of the coastal regions to the south of Maryland, down to the Florida border – the distressed cavaliers mentality is much less prevalent than is generally assumed.

The values of the Quakers can be seen in many aspects of what is generally regarded as typical of America’s cultural identity. The paradox, however, is that the Quakers’ direct influence on political decision-making is much less obvious that that of the other great waves of colonisation. This is due mainly to the fact that, from 1756, the Quakers formally withdrew from the administration of the colony of Pennsylvania, which they had founded. Moderate and socially successful Quakers, were then partially subsumed into the mainstream of American religious pluralism. The more dogmatic Quakers conformed to the growing evangelism that had a major impact on the cultural identity of the United States, particularly in the nineteenth century. The Quaker cultural identity therefore also penetrated the religious grassroots movements in the United States.

Interestingly, for a long time little attention was paid to the influence of the traditional national character of the Scots and Ulstermen. But their specific cultural value system had a major impact on America’s cultural identity. The influence of these settlers from Scotland and Northern Ireland is interesting above all because they vastly outnumbered the Puritans, the *distressed cavaliers* and the Quakers. Furthermore, their members did not come mainly from an elite. These were ordinary people who came primarily in search of better living conditions. Finally, it was this group that was responsible for the expansion to the West, and so it was largely their value system that was to play a dominant role in the development of the cultural identity of the New Continent.

Besides the influence of the ‘germs’ of the first, largely British Protestant settlers, I also explored the impact of non-British ethnic groups, four categories of which can be distinguished. First, of course, there were the Native Americans. Their impact on the country’s cultural identity is often ignored, but recent research has found that it was greater than has been assumed in the past.

Second, the influence of African-American slaves. As with the Native Americans, for a long time little or no attention was paid in the literature to the influence of their culture on the development of America’s cultural identity. Again, this has been put into perspective recently. We can for example see that the religious practices of evangelical
and fundamentalist Christian groups includes many elements that originally came from African Americans.

Third, there were the settlers of Spanish-Mexican origin, some of whom had settled on the continent before the first British settlers arrived. Fourth were the white Western settlers – principally German, French, Dutch and Swedish – who were also largely Protestant. The influence of these settlers on the development of the country’s cultural identity is certainly worth considering. And, finally, there were other settlers, like the Jews, who were not Protestant, who certainly had an impact on the development of America’s cultural identity.

The second category of theories holds that the experience of the first settlers, in the unique circumstances of the new continent, and the social and economic developments that occurred there, were a decisive factor in the formation of the value system that is characteristic of America. I have called this the ‘interaction thesis’, three variations of which can be distinguished.

The first is the ‘frontier thesis’, the basis of which is the idea that American cultural values can be understood only if one considers the impact of the new circumstances on the development of specifically American core values. This thesis is open to a number of criticisms, however. The fact that it was developed at precisely the moment when, in 1890, the US Census Bureau officially declared that, according to the official definition, the United States no longer had a frontier, is particularly telling. The frontier thesis thus suggests that the huge flow of new immigrants who arrived after this date made no contribution to America’s cultural identity. In other words: they can also lay no claim to that identity, and are forced simply to adapt to it.

Despite these reservations, however, some elements of the frontier thesis and the myths and narratives with which it is surrounded provide a number of interesting insights into how America’s cultural identity was formed.

Firstly, the gradually shifting frontier provided an unprecedented opportunity to repeatedly start anew and undertake new things. Furthermore, the frontier acted as a kind of ‘safety valve’ when the pressure of population growth became too great.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that many Americans were – and still are – very positive about the idea of the American identity as an outcome of the frontier experience. According to many authors, the frontier provided the basis for typically American features of culture such as direct democracy and civil society. The frontier thesis had an enormous influence because, for example, it paints an image of America’s cultural identity as Americans like to see themselves. So it is not whether the frontier thesis is correct that is important, but the fact that it is perceived as true.

Thirdly, a more moderate form of the frontier thesis allows us to link it to the other explanatory models, such as germ thesis. The frontier mentality correlates significantly, for example, with the cultural characteristics of the mainly poorer settlers from Scotland and Ireland and the later settlers of non-British-Protestant origins. In this sense, a dominant cultural identity emerges that is a synthesis of the ‘germ’ of the Scots-Irish settler culture, the cultural identity that emerged in response to the new circumstances and the influence of other non-British settlers and immigrants.
This cultural identity is often equated in the literature to the culture of the 'backwoodsmen'. This is important to remember. The backwoodsmen were not only much more dominant in terms of numbers than the other three waves of settlers, they were also from much lower social classes, and not only British. Furthermore, idealism based on religious fervour was certainly not their primary motive for settling on the new continent.

The second variation on the *interaction thesis* is the ‘*migration thesis’*. The first ideas on the phenomenon of migration emerged in the final decade of the nineteenth century, when the impact of the new flow of immigrants on social relations became clear. The issue of assimilation and the problems associated with it are the key factors in this thesis.

*The migration thesis* is particularly important to the idea that America’s cultural identity is the result of the merging of the different ethnic groups that ultimately made up the population of the United States. This process of assimilation is not, however, as easily defined as first appears. The question is: who exactly adapted, and under what conditions?

By far the most commonly used metaphor for the impact of immigrant assimilation on the country’s cultural identity is the ‘melting pot’. There are several versions of this metaphor, based on different assumptions.

First, there are the theories that argue that the melting pot had a pronounced British Protestant character. In other words: the British Protestant culture was already dominant, remained dominant, and should remain dominant. According to this approach, features of other cultures brought in by immigrants were simply subsumed into the British Protestant culture.

Second, there is the view that non-British immigrants certainly did make their mark on the development of America’s cultural identity. For instance, it is argued that the earlier British Protestant settlers and the older immigrant groups from northern and western Europe quietly merged to form a new cultural identity. The distinction between the British and the Nordic Europeans was not so great, according to this thesis. They were all *white Caucasians*, all of whom had qualified for civil rights since the early days of the United States. The addition of other ethnic groups who were not British, white or Protestant – like the Chinese – presented more problems, as did the different religions. For example, it was not until after the Second World War that people began to refer to the ‘Jewish-Protestant-Catholic cultural heritage’ as the basis of America’s religious identity.

The second approach to the *migration thesis* focuses on the historical context in which large groups of people migrated to the United States throughout its entire history. This approach emerged from the 1970s onwards when, under the influence of world systems theory, human migration came to be seen as an integral part of social and economic development.

According to the proponents of this version of the *migration thesis*, large-scale migration can be seen as a kind of primeval process focused on the idea that people always seek to settle where the circumstances are most favourable. Ideas about freedom
and about the United States as ‘the new paradise’ were thus seen as a sales pitch to persuade people to migrate. This means that the voluntaristic nature of American society needs some qualification. By no means everyone came ‘of their own free will’, and by no means everyone was in a position ‘to make a completely fresh start’. Against the backdrop of this process of migration, which has been described as an overwhelming historical phenomenon, the exodus of just 20,000 Puritans from England is not, unsurprisingly, regarded as the only factor determining America’s cultural identity.

The migration thesis also considers the complex interaction between the various groups involved, each of which had its own cultural patterns. This thesis therefore also argues that America’s cultural identity cannot be regarded as exclusively British and Protestant, but is the result of this interaction.

Finally, those who adhere to this version of the migration thesis will argue, in response to the question of who is responsible for the formation of the cultural identity, that it was mainly the poor settlers, not the East Coast elite.

The third variant is what I understand as the ‘modernisation thesis’, at the core of which lies the idea that culture is not static, and that we should focus on the interaction between, on the one hand, economic and social developments resulting from the global Capitalist system and, on the other, the emergence of a cultural identity. Analysis according to the modernisation thesis can yield important insights into how America’s cultural identity developed.

According to the modernisation thesis, the interaction between the economic context and cultural identity laid the foundations for the religious and political circumstances that gave rise to the American War of Independence in the eighteenth century. It has been suggested in the literature that many of the new colonists in the period prior to the War of Independence were enjoying a level of prosperity of which they had only been able to dream in the past. These colonists were not about to give up their material wealth. It was the raising of taxes by the British that ultimately gave rise to the War of Independence. Idealism, ideology and religion played only a secondary role.

The modernisation thesis also shows us that economic developments in the South led to entirely different cultural patterns than those in the North. Finally, urbanisation manifested itself in different ways in the North and Southwest, giving rise to major differences in cultural values.

The third category of theories holds that the cultural values which the United States upholds are the results of a greater plan. A plan that might even be regarded as the final phase of cultural history. I refer to this category by the general term manifest destiny thesis, of which there are three main variants.

The first is based on the idea that the United States began as a religious experiment, and that the values that featured in this exercise are fundamental to the country’s cultural identity. I have called this the providential history thesis.
The second is the Enlightenment thesis. The key element of the Enlightenment philosophy that came to dominance in America is the idea that the values that form the foundations of the country’s cultural identity are self-evident.

The third variant is the social Darwinism thesis, based on the idea that there is a natural ranking of cultural value systems, and that the prevailing value system in the United States is superior to every other.

We can draw a number of conclusions from the development of religiosity in the United States and its consequences both for the development of the country’s national cultural identity and for the process of strategic decision-making. Though the success of religious ‘great awakenings’ might have transformed the United States into a Christian nation, as the traditional Christian communities – like the Puritans, the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians – in the Northeast tended to become progressively more rational and worldly in their religious convictions, grassroots worship in the frontier regions of the Midwest and Southwest grew more anti-intellectual, emotional and evangelical. We can also say that it was not so much the British elite who left the deepest mark on American religiosity and the American values based on it, but rather the great mass of settlers and later immigrants.

Furthermore, the transition in ideas that came to dominate foreign policy occurred to a large extent in parallel with the change in the Christian cultural identity of the United States from Puritan, Presbyterian and Anglican to a dominant grassroots evangelical cultural identity, as represented by Christian communities like the Southern Baptist Church, the Pentecostal communities and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This saw the United States transformed from a ‘promised land’ to a ‘crusader state’. As a consequence of this change in thinking, in its strategic decision-making on foreign policy the United States claims not only the right, but also the duty, to intervene in the international order.

If we look at the impact of Enlightenment philosophy as a variant of the manifest destiny of the United States, we find that the more intellectual versions of Enlightenment thinking and the more rational and worldly religious ideas associated with it were mainly the province of the elites in the traditional colonies of the Northeast coastal states. The evangelical versions of religiosity and the populist interpretation of the basic cultural assumptions that emerged from Enlightenment philosophy travelled with the people who left for the hinterland of the new colonies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in search of new places to settle.

Finally, we see how these ideas on destiny, the implied greatness of the United States and the moral superiority of its cultural identity – which are particularly evident in social Darwinism – became a raw political force. Policymakers managed to mobilise this force, drawing legitimacy for their actions from the support for the underlying ideas in broad sections of the population.

The theses on the emergence of America’s cultural identity explored in my research all help explain how core cultural dimensions are expressed in that identity. As I have said, I looked only at those core dimensions which I believe played an important role in the process of strategic decision-making in the run-up to and during the war on terror.
A high degree of individualism is regarded as a characteristic core element of America’s cultural identity. The way individualism has manifested itself there is often ascribed in the literature to the influence of the Puritans. The relationship between individualism and the Puritan cultural heritage needs to be put into perspective, however. The characteristic image of the Reformation, whereby man’s relationship with God came to be regarded as an ultimately personal experience, and the idea that the high degree of individualism prevalent in the United States grew out of this idea, via the Puritan faith of Winthrop and his followers, requires some reconsideration. The Puritans did not believe that the individual could lay claim to a personal bond with God. And the status of God’s ‘chosen one’ became official only once the previous chosen ones – the saints – acknowledged it.

Nor were individual freedom and deviant behaviour appreciated, particularly when it came to interpretation of the Bible. Those who espoused other ideas were persecuted, banished or forced to conform. The ‘correct’ interpretation of the Bible was used as a yardstick. The Bible was reduced to questions that could be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The truth could therefore only be learnt or enforced by discipline, not interpreted.

The idea of man as an individual and the individualism to which this gives rise is closely associated in the American context with the relationship between man and nature. To the settlers, nature was not only threatening in an immediate sense; in a figurative sense, too, there was a conflict between man in his natural, animal state and man in control of his instinctive urges. Puritans were not therefore at one with nature, nor did they seek harmony with nature; to them, nature was something to be dominated. Concessions to nature were regarded more as a sign of weakness than of strength.

The basis for the battle with nature also influenced the Puritans’ attitude to the Native Americans, who personified the wilderness. In extreme circumstances, it was better not merely to tame the wilderness, but to destroy it. This thinking was also applied to the Native Americans. In this context, America’s attitude to its enemies has a very nasty biblical connotation. Only a dead enemy can guarantee the salvation of the American soldier.

The distressed cavaliers of Virginia also had a special interpretation of the concept of individualism. In this elite, individualism and individual freedom meant that ‘some had the right to govern others’.

The Quakers differed from the Puritans in their views on individualism. They did assume a very personal bond between the individual and God. This belief was crucial to the Quaker world view, and they took it to its extreme.

The settlers from the fourth wave of colonisation also set great store by individual freedom. To them, individualism above all meant having control over their situation, individualism in the sense of self-reliance. A reluctance to accept any form of central authority was also characteristic of the Scots-Irish settlers.

Almost all authors who concern themselves with America’s cultural identity explain Americans’ extremely high scores for individuality partly in the specifically American context of the frontier. In this context, individualism is something to be
proud of, a sign of action, control over the situation, creativity, entrepreneurship, leadership, and the pride that does not allow a person to kowtow to authority.

One of the most striking points is that individualism in American society does not appear to have been affected by the arrival of a range of different ethnic groups. The literature suggests various reasons for this. Many immigrants came alone, or with only their immediate family, and many of them had either voluntarily or forcibly left behind a deeply-rooted traditional collectivism. Immigrants were also expected to be individualistic. Furthermore, poorer immigrants to the United States had come to improve their circumstances. In this sense, they conformed readily to the American creed of the pursuit of happiness based on individual freedom.

The concept of individualism is also inextricably tied to Enlightenment thinking. The Enlightenment idea that the individual had a duty to tame and exploit nature and claim the benefits for himself merged almost seamlessly with the Puritan cultural tradition discussed above.

Another point crucial to the type of individualism that emerged from Enlightenment thinking is the idea that America was a place people went to of their own free will. America thus represented the chance to ‘start afresh’ and engage in the pursuit of happiness by grasping the opportunities on offer there.

In the context of the frontier, where settlers faced the constant risk of losing everything they had built up, this pursuit of happiness was largely about acquiring and retaining personal property. Personal property would not only ensure your safety, it also represented who you were, or who you had become.

The later immigrants, who were generally poorer, thought along the same lines. Their American dream was to find a better life and acquire personal property. Any attack on this property must therefore be repelled by all means possible.

I believe the way the dimension of universalism manifests itself in American culture is vital to the way in which strategic decisions are taken and legitimised in the American context. The first thing to consider is the direct link which, according to many authors, can be made between America’s brand of universalism and the Puritan cultural legacy. The universalism of the Puritans cannot be seen in isolation from their creed. Several authors argue that the Puritans sincerely believed that they were the ‘new martyrs’ and that they had ‘succeeded the Jews as the people chosen to create a new land’. John Winthrop’s followers did indeed expressed themselves in such biblical terms.

Universalism is reflected here mainly in the idea of ‘redeeming us and reforming them’. ‘Redeeming us’ refers to the continual need to reaffirm one’s belief in one’s own truth, while ‘reforming them’ refers to a mission to convince outsiders of that truth, either willingly or unwillingly. The consequence of ‘redeeming us’ is that the ‘in-group’ has to be kept intact.

Besides this drive for self-redemption, there must also always be an enemy. According to this approach, the way in which Americans view war and the enemy is informed entirely by the ‘us against them’ or ‘good against evil’ idea. They believe in the concept of ‘just wars’ and ‘unjust wars’. According to this view, the enemy fights on the side of the devil. Americans have no doubt that God is on their side, that they are
engaged in ‘just wars’. Furthermore, the enemy has insincere motives, cannot be trusted and, fighting in the service of evil, has no rights.

The universalist principles of those who came with the other waves of settlers were less determined by religion. The elite of Virginia did however have very clear ideas about individualism and personal freedom, which correspond to a great extent to the idea of universalism. These were the ‘guardian angels’ to whom the British – for these were the distressed cavaliers of British descent – gave the right to ‘rule the waves’.

Finally, the Scots-Irish settlers had very definite ideas about good and evil. There were no grey areas for them, particularly when it came to their attitude to the enemy. The enemy must be totally destroyed, and all means were justified to this end.

These universalist principles are reflected above all in a tendency to contrast the good inherent in one’s own group against the evil of other groups. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular, such ideas took on an overtly racist and violent complexion, under the influence of social Darwinism. The image of a peaceful melting pot, or a spontaneous *e pluribus unum* is certainly misleading. The continual ‘in-group/out-group’ comparisons exaggerated the alleged differences, which were used to legitimise the repression of certain groups.

The melting pot character of contemporary American society has complex implications for the manifestation of universalist principles in foreign policy today, however. Over the past few decades, in particular, the tendency to use universalism as a basis for strategic decision-making has been very strong. Unlike in the period up to roughly the mid-1970s, in recent decades this universalism has been fed by descendants of non-British and even non-Northern European immigrants. Many of the intellectuals and politicians who are regarded as the architects of neoconservatism, which draws heavily on universalist ideas, do not come from the traditional Wasp elite of the Northeast. Interestingly, however, they are even more fanatical about the original universalist principles of that elite, which are based on the moral right to intervene.

Universalism as a basis for Enlightenment thinking also had a major impact in the United States. Concepts like ‘self-evident’, ‘natural’ and ‘inalienable’ – precisely the concepts that have had such major implications for American foreign policy – are carved in stone.

Finally, the principle of social Darwinism provided the ‘scientific’ justification for the superiority of America’s values. If ‘survival of the fittest’ was the criterion for natural selection, and the United States was unmistakably the ‘fittest’, the country’s natural superiority could produce only one winner: the United States.

The main consequence of the universalism of the *manifest destiny thesis* is that the United States’ destiny was to grow into a dominant world power. The universalist way of thinking took on the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, based on the idea of ‘might makes right’. The United States’ success in the global capitalist system – in the second half of the twentieth century the country had undeniably become the dominant player in the world economy – reinforced the universalist view in a number of ways. With their firm belief in their own formula for success, the Americans felt there was no need to
adjust either their thinking on strategic objectives, or the way they planned and implemented their strategy.

Besides the idea that reality can be divided into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, another factor in America’s cultural identity is the idea that reality can be divided into very specific problems, each of which can be individually addressed. This view came, in the Puritan tradition, from the ‘correct’ interpretation of the Bible. The Bible was divided into questions that could be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. No discussion or qualification was needed, because the answers were there in black and white.

This practical, straightforward view of reality, contrasting with a more holistic approach, was also popular in the frontier context, where one could not afford to think too long, or with too much subtlety, about practical daily problems whose prompt resolution literally meant the difference between life and death.

We see, too, that Enlightenment thinking led to intellectualism only in certain limited circles in the Northeast and among the elite of the South. The backwoodsmen had no truck with ‘endless discussion’. Intelligence and education were fine, but they had to be put to practical use.

This tendency to chop up problems is also reflected in the American production system. The best known example was the use of production lines in Henry Ford’s car manufacturing plant. This way of thinking is typified by a strong emphasis on facts and figures, as well as the idea that strategic plans can be implemented in a linear and sequential manner, and that one must never deviate from the chosen path.

When it comes to power distance, we see that in the Puritan community inequality was seen as part of the natural order. The function of religion in the Eastern coastal states was above all to reinforce the power and status of the established authorities.

Power distance was even greater among the distressed cavaliers of the South, where there was major disparity in terms of hierarchy and the rights associated with one’s hierarchical position. Property-owning British and non-British settlers from good families had rights. Other groups, like the poorer settlers, did not at first have rights, while others – the Native Americans and African Americans, for instance – never acquired them at all.

The Quakers, by contrast, were a completely non-hierarchical community, with no official ministers or leaders.

Americans’ attitude to power distance owes a great deal to the Scots-Irish settlers’ interpretation of this concept. They are described as proud and stubborn, an attitude targeted mainly at the federal government, and still a key feature of large groups of the American population. Their often overt hatred of central authority cannot, however, be equated entirely with a failure to accept power distance. In fact acceptance of power distance among Scots-Irish settlers had a clear cultural basis. In the original context, their leaders were often clan heads, and so had always enjoyed status, power and respect. We can see a similar attitude in the context of the frontier. Though the power of the federal government was hated, here too we nevertheless find acceptance
of power distance and a yearning for strong leadership. In the context of the frontier, leadership was not, however, accepted unquestioningly on the basis of acquired status. Leaders in the backwoodsmen tradition were generally people of great charisma, but leadership status had to be earned by action. In the frontier territories, a talent for organisation, generalist characteristics, charisma and communication skills were more important than specialisation. A leader was expected above all to come up with practical solutions to everyday problems. He did not need to reinvent the wheel, but he did need to inspire his men.

Interestingly, there was always a materialistic side to leadership in the backwoodsmen tradition. Leaders became landowners, traders and speculators. This interweaving of local politics and local interests would have a lasting effect on Americans’ attitude to power. In the backwoodsmen culture, democracy was not a matter of a leader championing ‘the cause of his people; he simply invited people to champion him’.

Clan relationships explain why, in the libertine tradition common in the frontier territories, there was no room for political opposition. Anyone with different cultural norms or political ideas could expect fierce and often violent opposition. Incidentally, clan relationships also account for the extraordinary arrogance with which the elite wielded their power. There were virtually no checks on power, and politicians and businessmen were often able to get away with mismanagement, corruption and blatant self-enrichment.

The way in which religion is organised in the United States has also had a bearing on attitudes to power. The mainly evangelical and fundamentalist Christian communities have always depended on financial contributions from their members. It is literally a matter of ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’. The message preached from the pulpit had to chime with the values of the grassroots members. The same in fact applies to national politicians: in taking decisions they too have to take account of local interests and cultural values.

In the literature, several other dimensions derive from individualism. One that is particularly important to America’s cultural identity is action- or task-orientation. The relationship between this pronounced feature of America’s cultural identity and the Puritan legacy appears self-evident at first glance. After all, in their interpretation of Calvin’s dogmas, the Puritans assumed that divine grace would fall only to those who had made clear by their actions that they were worthy of God’s mercy. To experience divine grace through a personal rebirth was what every believer hoped for. Here, too, however, the situation is complex, because although there can be no ‘epiphany’ without ‘doing’— a person who does not live according to God’s word and does not therefore do the right thing can never experience an epiphany — according to classic Puritan teachings, nor will action-orientation automatically lead to one. Action alone is not enough. Ultimately, it is about how your achievement is judged. But what if you fail to achieve anything? Failure is regarded as a sign that a person is no good. This also explains Americans’ harsh attitude to ‘losers’ and ‘quitters’. Is it not ultimately the case that people who end badly were simply not worthy of winning?
With the Virginia elite’s emphasis on status and background, the cultural dimensions of action-orientation and achievement carried less weight with them than with the Puritans of New England. One major difference lay in the fact that the Virginians did not have Christian motives for settling in America. Unlike the Puritans, they did not feel they had an almost God-given duty to achieve.

The restless striving for a better existence became almost second-nature to the poorer American settlers and later immigrants, however. This attitude had a lasting impact on the way Americans view chances and opportunities, which are there to be grasped. According to this way of thinking, this is in fact the duty of every American.

Enlightenment thinking further reinforced the tendency to action. The idea of time being in short supply is a key basic element of American culture. Time literally flies, and what’s done is done. This is exemplified by the guides for efficient use of time found in the many writings of Benjamin Franklin, for example. Expressions like ‘time is money’, ‘don’t waste time’, ‘yesterday is dead and gone’ and ‘there’s no use crying over spilt milk’ are therefore part of the dogma that is key to America’s cultural identity. This leaves little time for reflection.

The violent expression of the masculinity dimension is a key feature of America’s cultural identity, which initially grew out of experiences at the frontier. We must not forget that the frontier and conflict with the Native Americans continued to dominate the lives of every resident of the traditional East Coast settlements until the end of the eighteenth century. We should also bear in mind that this violent attitude was part of the settlers’ existing cultural identity, particularly those of Scots-Irish descent.

But violence was not only targeted against the Native Americans at the frontier. Personal feuds and mutual hatred between Scottish and English settlers, for example, led to conflict in which ‘no surrender’, revenge and ‘take no prisoners’ were key concepts.

The violent expression of masculinity is also reflected in the norms and values regarding warfare prevalent among rank and file soldiers. This is not surprising, since these ranks were largely populated by the lower social classes, mainly poorer settlers of Scots-Irish descent, who were later joined by large numbers of poor Irish Catholics.

The dominance of the backwoodsmen mentality among the army rank and file can still be seen today. Nowadays, their ranks also include poorer Hispanics and African Americans. One study found that the most common reason given for joining the army was ‘it’s part of our heritage to fight’.

In the American tradition, the violent expression of masculinity is not always condemned. On the contrary: President Theodore Roosevelt said that the American settlers and later immigrants had not only managed to keep themselves going by using violence, but also that this expression of masculinity had laid the foundations of American culture.

And so, the violent expression of masculinity becomes a prescriptive feature of American’s cultural identity. After all, if war made America great, then war also reaffirms that greatness. The message is clear. Every generation sheds its blood for the next and every successive generation is obliged to do the same. As a result, anti-
militarism is not only a rare thing in America’s cultural identity, forged at the frontier, in certain circles it is actually regarded as fundamentally un-American.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension is described in the literature as a reflection of how groups deal with tension. In analysing how this is expressed in the American context, we can distinguish two sides to this dimension.

First, a positive attitude to uncertainty, which is seen as opportunity. Seizing opportunities is one of the most important aspects of America’s cultural identity. Second, however, there is a negative manifestation of this dimension, seen mainly in the context of the frontier, where people lived in constant fear of losing everything they had achieved. In this context, uncertainty was avoided in the most direct way possible, by claiming the right to bear arms and reducing uncertainty by striking first rather than waiting to be attacked.

This fear of losing everything was further reinforced by immigration and economic developments from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. To poor immigrants and those who, risking life and limb, had fled oppression or – in the case of the Jews – genocide, their material possessions and hard-won security were of paramount importance.

The development of America’s cultural identity is reflected in distinct clusters, at the core of which we can still discern the four first waves of colonisation and their geographical distribution. The cultural core dimensions are expressed differently in these clusters, and these differences have had major implications for political relations in America. The link between cultural identity and political culture is crucial, because it reveals how the expression of cultural core values impacts on the process of strategic political decision-making.

The impact of the original four cultural clusters on politics is reflected in the fact that, according to the literature, almost all US presidents – and even their closest staff members and ministers – can trace their roots back to these clusters. But even more important than the roots of the various presidents is the fact that the representatives of the four traditional cultural clusters were often very belligerent towards each other, and all had their own strategic objectives. Despite this mutual distrust and out-and-out abhorrence of the values for which the other group stood, however, all factions were dependent on alliances with other factions to implement at least part of their agenda.

These historically defined geographical cultural clusters still exist to this day. I would, however, suggest that the influence of the backwoodsmen attitude at the grassroots is much greater than is often assumed. The importance of this becomes even clearer if we consider what is referred to in the literature as the ‘southernization’ of American political culture. This process, which has occurred over the past fifty years, has not spread the distressed cavalier attitude, but has instead ensured the growing dominance of the cultural identity of the backwoodsmen in the process of strategic political decision-making. Incidentally, the backwoodsmen attitude was not specifically confined to the
The same mentality attributed to the grassroots culture of the South is also seen in the social underclass in northern states like Ohio, Illinois and Indiana.

To trace the structural causes of the process of southernization, we must go back to the 1930s. It was during the economic crisis that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt managed to forge a rainbow coalition. His own roots were in New England, but the failures of his Republican predecessors meant that, with his pragmatic economic policies and government interventions designed to produce material progress, he was able to gain an electoral majority. Roosevelt’s grassroots support consisted of an alliance of voters from the impoverished South and new, mainly poorer, immigrants in the industrial North. This coalition also won the support of what were then the leading factions of America’s economic elite.

This ‘New Deal’ coalition remained intact after the Second World War. It was characterised by what is known in the literature as a ‘Fordist’ concept of control. The period from 1948 to 1965 is regarded as the heyday of Fordism. The New Deal was not only a Democrat project, however. During that period, the Republicans also supported both domestic and foreign policy.

The policy of the New Deal eschewed the idea of government intervention in the private lives of citizens based on Puritan values. For example, when Roosevelt entered office in 1933, he abolished Prohibition, which had first been introduced in 1919. At the same time, however, the authorities gained much more influence over the economy. Southerners accepted this ‘distancing from the old values of America’ so long as high rates of poverty needed to be tackled.

As a consequence of the policy, however, the government boosted the economy of the South without having any impact on the Southern mentality, which had grown more racist since the adoption of the Jim Crow laws after 1877. The problem surfaced between 1955 and 1965, as African Americans’ struggle for civil rights reached a high point. It became apparent that the reforms initiated by central government had gone too far for many Southerners, and they distanced themselves more and more from this aspect of the policy.

Thus, as prosperity grew in the South – as a result of government intervention – so too did opposition to the values of the New Deal politics. As a result, the Democrat-led New Deal coalition lost the Southern vote in the late 1940s. One important watershed came in 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. Over a period of twenty years, what is referred to in the literature as the Great Reversal took place, as the Republicans took over the South, while the Democrats’ power base shifted to the North. The names of the parties reversed; the culturally determined voting pattern remained the same.

In parallel with this process, between roughly 1940 and the year 2000, a shift took place in the social and economic balance of power, from the Northeast to the Southwest. There were a number of structural causes for this shift.

The first structural shift occurred as the country’s economic centre moved from the North to the South. The driving force behind industrial development in the South
was the growth in the defence industry during the Second World War. Another sector that flourished, mainly after the Second World War, in the Southwest, West and Midwest, was the oil industry. This was followed by the advent of the high-tech industry, particularly in the 1970s, and there were also major shifts in the economic balance of power due to the rise of the corporate services sector associated with this new industry.

This economic shift reversed the trend in internal migration. Instead of moving from the ‘poor’ South to the ‘rich’ North, during the final decades of the twentieth century, the opposite occurred. When people migrate voluntarily, they also seek out groups with whose value system they can identify. From the point of view of cultural identity, it is important to note that the originally grassroots identity of northern states like Ohio, Indiana and Illinois was greatly influenced by the northward migration of Southern backwoodsmen. Today’s migrants might be said not so much to be leaving their culture behind, as to be returning to their cultural home.

These economic developments and reverse migration have been accompanied by a real-estate boom and a type of urbanisation different from that seen in older cities like New York and Philadelphia. In fact, there are barely any cities nowadays, just metropolitan sprawl. The relative solidarity typical of the New Deal era has disappeared. The old frontier mentality of self-sufficient communities that want nothing to do with central government is now dominant.

The shift in the economic and demographic centre has been reflected in the way in which groups in society have responded to the modernisation of American society since the post-war period. The 1964 election revealed how many people rejected new values, such as civil rights for African Americans and the sexual liberation of the 1960s. The contrasts between the various cultural clusters only grew after that, and this trend has even been referred to in the literature as culture war.

Interestingly, modernisation and progress have not led to secularisation in America. In fact, there have been two opposing movements. Though the expected correlation between progress and secularisation has occurred, it has only been in the traditional faith communities found mainly in the North. And the opposite is also happening, with evangelical and fundamentalist movements seeing huge growth in their numbers. They act as a mobilising force for the grassroots protest against the effects of modernisation that is a feature of the ‘culture wars’.

Finally, a group of intellectuals and policymakers who reject leftist ideology have emerged since the mid-1960s. These neocons, as they are known, were to make an important mark on the foreign policy of the government of George W. Bush.

The Republican party and its voters, particularly in the South, emerged as the winners in the culture wars. A change in population ratios had a major impact on the membership of the House of Representatives. The 435 seats in the House are allocated to the states on the basis of the number of residents. A census is held every ten years, the results of which are used to determine how many seats each state should have. The population increase in the South has meant that this region has gained representatives, while
Northern states like New York and Massachusetts have lost seats in the House of Representatives.

This shift in the economic and social balance of power has also affected the attitude of the political elite. The literature details how, from the 1980s, a neoliberal agenda came to dominate politics. The Southern oil sector and the military-industrial complex, along with the allied high-tech industry and corporate services sector, feature strongly on this agenda. This elite has no interest in the continuation of the New Deal policy. Its interests are served by deregulation, privatisation and unrestricted international capital transfers.

It was during the 1980s, at the time of the Reagan administration, that the neoliberal agenda finally ousted the New Deal policy. Interestingly, however, during the Clinton years, deregulation, privatisation and an emphasis on the interests of capital markets were pushed even further.

The literature describes how the most important policy advisers both to George H. Bush and to his son George W. Bush were a combination of neoconservatives and other right-wing Republicans, whose main ties were to the military-industrial complex, the energy sector and the corporate services sector.

In terms of cultural identity, the differences between these groups are of fundamental importance. The neoconservatives come largely from among non-British – and even non-Western – migrant groups whose members struggled to cope with the process of forced assimilation, or Americanization. Interestingly, in terms of their role in the foreign policy of the United States, these neoconservatives – like Paul Wolfowitz – claim not only that the country has the right to impose its values on the rest of the world, but that it has a duty to do so. Politicians like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, on the other hand, should be regarded not as neoconservatives but as realists. Until the first Gulf War in 1991, the realists determined foreign policy.

The separation of minds emerged in the aftermath of the Gulf War. On the recommendations of his advisers, Bush sr. decided after defeating the Iraqi army in Kuwait not to push on and topple Saddam. The consequences were dramatic. The Shiites in southern Iraq rose up, expecting to receive American support, but none was forthcoming. Fearing that the region would be destabilised, the Americans abandoned the rebels. Hundreds of thousands were then butchered by Saddam’s elite troops. The neoconservatives in the Bush administration were furious about how the war turned out. They saw it as a missed opportunity.

The turnaround in policy came when Cheney and Rumsfeld rejected the Republican party’s realist-dominated foreign policy in the 1990s and allied themselves to the neoconservatives. In 1997 they both signed up to the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), which is regarded as the mission statement of neoconservative foreign policy objectives. Now they only had to wait for an opportunity to tackle Iraq. That opportunity came in the shape of 9/11.

The further southernization of the United States is reflected in the specific expression of the cultural core dimensions selected above in the development, planning,
legitimisation and actual operational implementation of strategic policy during the war on terror.

Individualism can clearly be seen in the preparations for the war against the Taliban and the regime of Saddam Hussein. From the outset, the Americans made it clear that, whether or not they received the support of allies, or a United Nations resolution, they would go their own way. This unilateral position was not without precedent, but it was typical of the attitude of the neoconservatives who, since the end of the Cold War, had not only regarded the United States as the only superpower in the world, but above all believed that the country had a right and duty to act as such.

One typically American expression of individualism is abhorrence of central government. As we have seen, this is particularly prevalent in the cultural identity of the backwoodsmen. It is not therefore surprising that grassroots Republicans had been such keen supporters of the privatisation and deregulation that began in the mid-1980s. During the George W. Bush administration, privatisation was also introduced at the Department of Defence. As a result, ‘armed contractors’ came to play a key role, both in supplying the army and in the reconstruction of Iraq. In both these roles, companies like Halliburton and Bechtel were given carte blanche. This caused myriad problems. Despite the millions spent on reconstruction, for example, little was achieved; the money disappeared and the failed implementation of the policy created a great deal of bad blood among Iraqis. The situation was even more serious when it came to army supplies. Large convoys literally thundered through the country, and private security firms like the infamous Blackwater killed and injured large numbers of civilians as they protected them.

Liberalisation also gave rise to self-enrichment and nepotism, and is reflected in the membership of the team who assisted the work of Paul Bremer III, the administrator in the transitional government established by the Americans. The high salaries paid in Iraq became by far the most important reason to take a position there.

Universalism in the form of an unshakeable belief in the moral supremacy of one’s own principles has always been a key feature of American foreign policy. Over the past decade, however, the country has become more than a ‘promised land’ that reluctantly intervenes on the world stage. During the war on terror, the United States has in fact pursued a policy more akin to that of a crusader state. This reflects the change in the Christian faith of George W. Bush, from the Presbyterian tradition in which he was raised to born again Christian, with a divine mission both for himself and for the country.

Evangelical principles gradually came to play a more active role. Bush’s speechwriters peppered his speeches with references to the Bible and to psalms, for example, in an attempt to appease voters using clearly recognisable symbolism and shared values.

But not all faith communities in the United States interpreted the universalist principles in the same way. For example, there were major differences between the way many Christians in the traditional communities, like the Presbyterians and Episcopalians, regarded the war, and the attitude of the evangelical Christians. The
majority of Presbyterians condemned the war, whereas no fewer than 80% of Evangelical religious leaders supported it.

The thinking in the Bush administration was clearly in terms of ‘good versus evil’ and ‘black-and-white’. There were no shades of grey, and there was a prevailing attitude of ‘those who are not for us are against us’. Taken to its extreme, universalism can lead to the idea that anything is justified in the name of ‘good’. Torture was a common and accepted tool in the service of ‘good’, used to reveal the truth. This attitude to torture during the Bush administration was exceptional, however. Not only was torture sanctioned at the highest level of government for the first time in American history, the United States also brushed aside international agreements banning torture to which it was itself a signatory.

The universalist attitude that manifested itself in ignorance through lack of training and in a complete lack of respect for the ideas and way of life of the Iraqi population, was reflected in several aspects of the way policy was implemented by the ordinary soldiers serving in Iraq. The treatment of prisoners and use of language by American soldiers and their officers showed their lack of respect for Iraqis, their complete insensitivity to the suffering of ordinary, innocent citizens and their blatant racism and deliberate cruelty.

The Americans therefore came to be seen more and more as an army of occupation rather than liberators, and the Iraqis simply did not accept that they had brought with them a ‘superior liberal democratic value system’.

Thinking in concrete and specific terms had major implications for strategy during the war on terror which the Bush administration declared immediately after the September 11th attacks. At first, things seemed so simple, and Al-Qaeda – the terrorist movement led by Saudi multimillionaire Osama bin Laden – could be fingered as the enemy. The enemy had a face, and that face was the Islamist fundamentalism of Al-Qaeda. It is striking how little attention Bush and his staff paid to the causes of terrorism. Bush was not familiar with extensive theories that had identified the breeding ground for Islamist terrorism, such as those developed by French intellectuals. Al-Qaeda may not have a country, but it had found a refuge in Taliban-led Afghanistan. The international community had few objections to the United States’ attacks on Al-Qaeda strongholds. Nor did they have any objection to the fact that those attacks also defeated the Taliban. But then things became more complicated. How should terrorism be tackled? America’s principle that only states can be actors in international relations was coming back to haunt it. Al-Qaeda was not a state. So which rogue state was behind the attacks? It must be Iraq. And what if Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and were to give them to Al-Qaeda? This scenario had to be avoided at all costs. The fact that Saddam’s Iraq had absolutely no affinity with Al-Qaeda simply did not fit into this picture.

We now all know that there were no weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but the crucial point was that the senior members of the Bush administration had already decided to attack Iraq and, for them, it was not so much a matter of verifying the accuracy of the facts presented, but of using them to legitimise the war. Another
A notable point is how rigidly Bush and his staff stuck to their position, despite changes in circumstances and new information.

Of course there were several reasons for attacking Iraq, but the policy officials close to Bush did not want to make things too complicated. A simple representation of the truth was a better way of convincing the American public of the need to go into battle against Evil.

The United States not only lost all perspective in devising and planning its strategic objectives, but also in building relations for its diplomatic offensive at the United Nations. The proceedings surrounding the interpretation of Security Council Resolution 1441 were a case in point. The key difference between the Bush doctrine and earlier doctrines is that, under the Bush version, the United States would itself decide when pre-emptive action was justified, and would act alone if necessary. The Americans would not wait for the support of or a mandate from the international community.

Interestingly, the high degree of individualism among Americans, derived from the backwoodsmen culture, is accompanied by a high acceptance of power distance and a great need for leadership. But leadership status has to be earned by action and achievement. It also speaks volumes that Bush was only really seen by his grassroots supporters as their leader after his announcement of resolute measures following the attacks of September 11th. According to a number of authors, Bush was decisive in taking control in this and other situations. He left no room for doubt; he simply acted. One might even say that the attacks were what made Bush ‘presidential’. In the eyes of the Americans, Bush was not the ‘trigger-happy cowboy’ who ‘irresponsibly and unjustly started a war’, as many in Europe saw him. On the contrary: Bush did precisely what his supporters expected. He announced that, with God’s help, he would punish the guilty and promised the American people that he would use all means at his disposal in doing so.

If we compare Bush’s leadership with that of his predecessors, we find another major difference besides his willingness to take revenge and his belief in pre-emptive strikes. As well as acceptance of hierarchy, the leadership culture of the backwoodsmen also always had a materialistic side. Their culture included shameless self-enrichment, and this was precisely the attitude of the captains of industry and government officials in Bush’s entourage. But it was not only the attitude of the prevailing political culture. The fact that it was more or less regarded as the norm, and that no one was ever held to account for it, was at least as important.

In his attempt to associate himself with the positive values his grassroots supporters associate with the concept of masculinity, Bush almost blatantly adopted as many outward characteristics as possible – in his dress and behaviour, for example – that would appeal to the masculine views of the Southern rednecks. Direct references to violence were not uncommon in his language. He received perhaps his biggest compliment when, in response to a speech in which Bush warned Saddam Hussein ‘you
got 48 hours’, an army officer said ‘he sounded just like John Wayne’. There are several references in the literature to the fact that this behaviour, appealing to cultural values, was entirely staged. The key thing, however, is that Bush got away with it, and that this type of behaviour, and the use of rituals, artefacts and language associated with it fit him like a glove.

The thinking that prevailed in the period immediately following 9/11 and the action to which it gave rise were not only based on these cultural dimensions, however. Uncertainly avoidance also played a key role. As I have said, this dimension has a negative expression in American culture, in the form of action undertaken out of a fear that one is about to lose everything one has built up. This implies that, if necessary, one will take the law into one’s own hands, and strike the enemy before he strikes. It is just a small step from thinking in terms of fear of losing everything to fear of weapons of mass destruction, and thence to the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive strikes.

At the operational level, in the implementation of strategic policy, uncertainty avoidance is a key component of the cultural identity of soldiers serving in Iraq. Generally speaking, self-reliance is a key principle for all soldiers. Military discipline represses this primary impulse, however, with rules of engagement. But in the culture of the backwoodsmen, the principle was ‘shoot first ask questions later’. This was also the practice in Iraq, where there was little regard for rules of engagement. ‘Basically it always comes down to self-defence, and better them than you.’ This was not only the attitude of the rank and file, it was also sanctioned by those in command.

The typically American expression of the dimension time is revealed at various points in the implementation of the plans. Bush promised to strike rapidly and without mercy, and had no time to wait for approval from the ‘Old Europe’ or from other allies.

Another aspect of Americans’ attitude to the concept of time is that time is not elastic, deadlines are sacred and non-negotiable, and that time unfolds in a linear and sequential fashion. And so it was with the decision-making during the Iraq war. Once the machine was set in motion, it could no longer be stopped, and any deviation from a straight timeline or reconsideration of decisions already taken simply did not fit into this conceptual framework.

The rigid timeframe and the associated pressure to achieve results quickly with little thought for underlying circumstances was typified by the attitude of Jay Garner, Paul Bremer’s predecessor. Having just arrived after the fall of Saddam in April 2003, he presented his plans. By August the reconstruction of the public infrastructure would be complete, ministries would have reopened, a constitution would have been written and adopted, elections would have been held and Iraq would have a functioning sovereign government. A stunned silence followed, until someone asked ‘August of which year?’