CHAPTER 15

Extending the Idea System to the War on Iraq

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in early October 2001 and removed the Taliban regime from power in early November 2001. A new government in Afghanistan headed by Hamid Karzai was temporarily installed in December 2001. Shortly thereafter, the Bush administration shifted their attention to Iraq.

The case against Iraq was predicated on a policy doctrine known as a "preemptive" or "preventive" doctrine by critics.[1] The central idea is that a preventive or preemptive military action would be justified when enemy regimes posed a grave threat to the national security of the United States.[2] After this new doctrine (idea) had been created, a whole chain of implications were deductively formed. *Because* there had already been a short list of officially declared state sponsors of terrorism (Cuba, Iraq,

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[1] Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, eds. Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (New York: The New Press, 2002).

[2] The introduction of the 2002 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* articulated the basic doctrine: "Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking **weapons of mass destruction**, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination… And, **as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed… History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act.** In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action." The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Libya) in government reports, [3] any country or entities that expressed support toward them could, theoretically, be encoded as their collaborators—or more mildly, as obstructors of the War on Terrorism. Bush specified the targets by using the new phrase (code) "Axis of Evil" to connect the regimes of Iraqi, North Korea, and Iran in the important 2002 State of Union Address, with Iraq receiving the longest description.

To connect to the conclusion that a military invasion was required, a further idea was proposed: *Iraq posed an eminent and imminent international threat, particularly and specifically to the United States, which could not be deterred by other means except through military ones.*

The Bush administration had sought to provide evidence (*compact symbolic structures*) for the Iraq threat in a number of ways, but in 2002–2003, the political discourse centered on two empirical arguments: (1) Iraq was likely to be in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and (2) it was likely to have active collaborative relationships with terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. Although cloaked in the form of empirical arguments—the administration acting as if it was conducting an exclusively empirical assessment—an ideational mode of codification was intermixed at critical junctures in such arguments. Such skillful, repeated intermixing was critical to constructing Iraq's threat. This chapter sketches out this "hybrid" codification method.

The Threat of Iraq: Codification in the Face of Empirical Ambiguity

First and foremost, the idea of an international or foreign threat requires both empirically and ideationally coded constructs. Physical capability alone does not define an international threat. The level of an international threat depends on the *ideational* caricature of a national leadership at least as much as the empirical profile of physical capability.

One of the many ways in which the Bush administration employed empirical-ideational hybrids to produce a chain of reasoning is this: a *good* nation (like the U.S.) can possess WMDs without introducing danger (or

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[3] For example, see U.S. Department of State, "Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001," accessed June 16, 2008, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2001//index.htm; The White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

can even reduce it); an *evil-and-rational* nation (like the U.S.S.R.) possessing WMDs would introduce a higher but deterrable danger; yet an *evil-and-insane* nation (like Iraq) equipped with WMDs could introduce a grave, non-deterrable danger. [4] By implication then, (a) the U.S. can and should possess WMDs; (b) the U.S.S.R. should not possess WMDs but it does not pose an imminent threat so long as deterrence is in place; (c) Iraq must not be allowed to possess WMDs, and its ownership required immediate actions.

But, did Iraq really possess WMDs?

There was a well-known situation of unresolved empirical ambiguity recognized by many experts involved in the international weapons inspection regimes. It was not clear in 2003 whether Saddam Hussein had WMDs from the end of the Gulf War in 1991 to that time. The discrepancy lay between the number of WMDs found by U.N. inspectors in Iraq and the number that the international community estimated that Iraq possessed. It also concerned whether Iraq had resumed WMDs-related programs after the U.N. inspectors were forced to leave Iraq, due to contentious reasons.[5]

WMDs encompasses three main types: (1) nuclear weapons; (2) chemical weapons (CWs), and (3) biological weapons (BWs). Although all lethal, the only *existentially* threatening form of WMDs to the United States as a nation would be nuclear weapons.

One position is that Iraq did not pose an imminent threat—or at least not one that could not be deterred. Former U.N. Chief Inspector Scott Ritter, as well as U.N. chief inspector in 2003, Hans Blix, had acknowledged that, while it was possible that a large number of WMDs remained hidden in Iraq, it was also possible that some WMDs had been destroyed by Iraq's government without documentation.[6] Chemical weapons (CWs)

[4] This point is explicitly covered in Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq: Bush's Reasoning Practices and Argumentation System," *Discourse and Society* 19, no. 4 (July 2008) 459–463.

[5] See Glen Rangwala, Nathaniel Hurd, and Alistair Millar. "A Case for Concern, Not a Case for War," in *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, eds. Micah L. Sirfy and Christopher Cerf (New York: Simon and Schuster), 2003, 457–63; Chang and Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq," 453–82.

[6] Hans Blix, "Briefing the Security Council, January 9, 2003: Inspections in Iraq and a Further Assessment of Iraq's Weapons Declarations," United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, accessed March 11, 2020, https://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/bx9jan.htm; Scott Ritter, *Frontier Justice: Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America* (New York: Context Books, 2003).

and biological weapons (BWs) have a certain shelf life, after which their lethality would be drastically reduced. Any further production efforts could have been prevented by reinstituting regular inspections by the U.N. Concerning nuclear weapons specifically, a report released by the CIA in 2002 stated, "Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any," indicating, at the very least, that the U.S. government acknowledged Iraq's possession of nuclear weapons was extremely ambiguous rather than clear.[7]

The following sections will show the opposite case build by the administration.

SECRETARY POWELL'S U.N. PRESENTATION

Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation on February 5, 2003, to the U.N. Security Council was a culminating event for justifying the War on Iraq. Secretary Powell represented the Bush administration in order to present its evidence in the most detailed, coherent, and systematic manner.[8] His main propositions could be captured in the following quote:

> The **gravity of this moment** is matched by **the gravity of the threat** that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world. Let me now turn to those deadly weapons programs and describe why they are **real and present dangers** to the region and to the world. [9]

[7] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, October 2002). The full sentence in the document is: "Although Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any, he remains intent on acquiring them."

[8] In later years, Colin Powell described that much of the internal intelligence information was drawn from the *National Intelligence Estimate* (NIE) produced by the intelligence community. And his intention was "go out to the CIA and draw the best items out of that NIE and make the speech out of that. That's what we did." Jason M. Breslow, "Colin Powell: U.N. Speech 'Was a Great Intelligence Failure'," PBS, last modified May 17, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/colin-powell-u-n-speech-was-a-great-intelligence-failure/ (accessed May 30, 2022).

[9] Colin Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," U.S. Department of State, released on February 5, 2003, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm (accessed May 30, 2022).

Intelligence Sources as a Superior Kind of Information

Before proceeding further, Powell first asserted that the information the administration possessed was not of an ordinary kind. It was backed up by "solid sources"—mainly "solid intelligence." Some information was vouched to internal, intelligence experts, as were the "facts and conclusions":

> My colleagues, every statement I make today is **backed up** by sources, **solid sources.** These are **not assertions**. What we're giving you are **facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence**. I will cite some examples, and these are from **human sources**.

In this quote, Powell elevated the status of the sources he used over others. If his information was backed up by sources, particularly "solid" sources, then it was not of the same empirical status as "assertions." A judgment of "solid" was rendered here. Who is to judge how "solid" the sources are as well as the validity, accuracy, relevance, and appropriate representation? In this case, it would be either Powell himself or undisclosed individuals who worked in intelligence agencies, or perhaps both together. The exact identity of the entity rendering the judgment is unclear.

Intelligence sources, however, were not available for open examination. A general audience was only able to see the filtered information; the members of the U.S. Congress and U.N. agencies were shared with more, but even they did not have complete access. It was therefore difficult to observe how intelligence information was filtered, and then made into "facts" and "conclusions." An implicit trust toward Powell's and the intelligence agencies' integrity is assumed (as established in prior ideational codification). To increase such trust, Powell emphasized the diversity and integrity of his sources:

> The material I will present to you comes from a **variety of sources**. Some are **U.S. sources**. And some are those of **other countries**. Some of the sources are **technical**, such as intercepted telephone conversations and photos taken by satellites. Other sources are **people who have risked their lives** to let the world know what Saddam Hussein is really up to.

In this one sentence, Powell sought to present a case with as many credible and authoritative figures as he could: people who have risked their lives, who gather and process "technical" information, and the governmental

units of multiple countries. "People who have risked their lives" conveyed moral authority; those who have technical skills conveyed technical authority. The original database of information was assumed to be trustworthy because of these diverse authorities.

Detailed Congruity and Account Convergence from a Polyphony of Authorities

Powell's borrowing of other countries' intelligence services was similar to the building of an impression of *detailed congruity* and *account convergence*.[10] Borrowing a variety of voices helped to create a polyphonic impression among various epistemic experts. Such a polyphony in turn helped to bolster the definitiveness of signs. Even if such signs are not linked with asserted facts with high certainty, having enough of them would still help to accumulate *uncertain signs* that come from expert sources.

Two such sources were Mohamed El-Baradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and Hans Blix, head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and former IAEA director general:

> I asked for this session today for two purposes: First, to support the core assessments made by Dr Blix and Dr El-Baradei. As Dr Blix reported to this council on January 27: "**Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament which was demanded of it**." And as Dr El-Baradei reported, Iraq's declaration of December 7: "**Did not provide any new information relevant to certain questions that have been outstanding since 1998**."

This adoption of a plurality of voices was highly selective. Blix, for example, in the same January 27 report to the U.N., stated, "we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons program since

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[10] "Ladies and gentlemen, these are not assertions. These are facts, corroborated by many sources, some of them **sources of the intelligence services of other countries**. For example, in mid-December weapons experts at one facility were replaced by Iraqi intelligence agents who were to deceive inspectors about the work that was being done there." "Powell's Remarks to U.N.," *The New York Times,* last modified February 5, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/05/international/powells-remarks-to-un.html (accessed May 30, 2022).

its elimination of the program in 1990s. However, our work is steadily still in midstream, progressing and should be allowed to run its natural course."[11] El-Baradei made an almost identical statement:

> To conclude: we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme since the elimination of the programme in the 1990s. However, **our work is steadily progressing and should be allowed to run its natural course**.[12]

Both Blix and El-Baradei reiterated these positions more strongly later on. But their statements and credibility were used selectively by Powell for his own codification purposes. Powell sought to draw *parallels* between the inspectors' words and his own judgment—the few people who were among the most authoritative and capable of examining empirical forms of evidence.

Accounting and Displaying Patterns in Ambiguous Empirical Materials

None of the information Powell presented was strong direct evidence—the kind akin to an exact video recording of a murder scene. Rather, Powell presented a collection of information that displayed extraordinary objects and patterns, which could not be explained by mere chance. To use a term we have previously adopted, these patterns were built by a collection of *uncertain signs*, which served as *circumstantial evidence* for Powell's arguments.

As a next step to build his case, Powell then offered an account that coherently explained the extraordinary objects and correlative patterns. Unsurprisingly, the account was primarily derived from the War on Terrorism script. Table 15.1 maps out the general manners in which the information was used to substantiate uncertain signs (which acted as

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[11] "No 'Genuine Acceptance' Of Disarmament, Blix Says," *Washington Post*, last modified January 1, 2003, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/01/28/no-genuine-acceptance-of-disarmament-blix-says/9129fdcd-f54f-4a4d-8274-364ea2aabf61/?utm_term=.9c9578f00b86 (accessed May 30, 2022).

[12] Mohamed El-Baradei, "The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: Statement to the United Nations Security Council," United Nations, last modified November 26, 2019, https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/status-nuclear-inspections-iraq (accessed May 30, 2022).

Table 15.1   Arrangements of uncertain signs—and circumstantial evidence—in Secretary Powell's 2003 U.N. presentation

Uncertain relations		Signs for sub-relations
A—B	A—B	Terrorist X crossed the border of Iraq
(e.g., Iraq-WMD relations;	A′—B′	Terrorist XX stayed in Iraq's hospital
Iraq-terrorist relations)	A″—B″	"Iraqis" had visited Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan
	A‴—B‴	"Iraq has hosted conferences attended by
	…	Palestine Islamic Jihad"
Uncertain facts		**Signs for sub-facts**
D	D′	"Forbidden ammo" in audiotape
(e.g., WMD capacities; stockpile	D″	Plan to develop mobile facilities
of WMDs)	D‴	Usual aluminum tubes
	D⁗	"Nerve gas" in audiotape

— = relations (e.g., correlations)

′ = variant or derivative

circumstantial evidence). I have broken down uncertain signs into two kinds: *uncertain relations* and *uncertain facts*. Uncertain relations refer to the relations between Iraq, WMD, and terrorist groups—which were asserted and suspected by the Bush administration but never fully proven. Equally, uncertain signs refer to the objects and facts that were asserted and suspected but the evidence for which was indefinite and indirect. Because the nature of such relations and the facts remained unknown and somewhat mysterious, each piece of concrete information only pointed to an incomplete, partial number of them. In other words, each piece of information might point to a "sub-relation" and a "sub-fact." Only by holistically viewing or aggregating them together could one—from the general coherent patterns shown—gain a fuller understanding of such uncertain relations and facts.

Relations between two things may be asserted in their *sequential or repeated co-presence*—for example, an event-type called "A" is followed by an event-type called "B" (e.g., an argument with a witch is frequently followed by unusual misfortunes). Facts may be presented in the form of *resemblance*—for example, an animal that looks like a cat may indeed be a cat, even if all cats look a bit different. Through two different ways, the items in the right column served as "evidence" for the concepts in the left column.

These evidential relations were implicitly and smoothly conveyed by Powell. His presentation chained the empirical information together in an intricate arrangement, intermittently bringing in ideas derived from the War

on Terrorism script to enhance coherence. Powell strategically organized empirical materials to lay out a clearly defined pathway, so that a willing audience—based on patterns they recognized—could walk the individual steps of deduction and idea generation, reaching conclusions on their own.

For example, Powell played two clips to the audience, which showed intercepted conversations. Neither of which were directly about WMDs; one concerned a "modified truck," and the other "forbidden ammos." Powell essentially provided intercepted conversations of what *resembled* hidden special trucks, which purportedly occurred *right before* the arrival of inspectors. Then he suggested these special trucks were a type of WMD production facility. This idea was tied to intelligence sources—to how "defectors" had described such trucks.

Powell presented satellite images of several alleged productive facilities. However, captured from afar, such images would have no discernable difference to regular facilities. The connections were made much clearer by Powell's verbal elaboration, in part aided by callout boxes and captioning on the visual slide, which highlighted a *coincidence* of locations that have had historical associations with WMDs, as well as current associations as suggested by experts. Any missing item that was not reported was quickly made to *look like* it was caused by a variant of lying and deliberate concealment, and any item which has been proven to be "concealed" in such a manner was not always differentiated in terms of its physical power or threat, hence old hard drive data could receive the label of "prohibited items" undifferentiated from the category of significantly more dangerous items.[13]

Consider how Powell provided a way to "make sense" of the ambiguities in the "raw data" (pre-coded information) he presented about the modified trucks. The verbatim narration of the intercepted conversation, which was also shown in PowerPoint slides, is presented in bold below; Powell's elaborative commentaries are in italics:

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[13] In the presentation, Powell stated: "Our sources tell us that in some cases the **hard drives** of computers at Iraqi weapons facilities were replaced. Who took the hard drives? Where did they go? What is being hidden? Why? *There is only one answer to the why: to deceive, to hide, to keep from the inspectors.* **Numerous human sources** tell us that the Iraqis are moving not just **documents** and **hard drives**, but **weapons of mass destruction**, to keep them from being found by inspectors. While we were here in this Council chamber debating Resolution 1441 last fall, **we know**, we know from sources that a missile brigade outside Baghdad was dispersing **rocket launchers and warheads containing biological warfare agent** to various locations, distributing them to various locations in western Iraq." The underlined sentence represents a clear example of ideational encoding being applied in the empirical assessment.

SECRETARY POWELL: *Let me pause and review some of the key elements of this conversation that you just heard between these two officers.*

First, they acknowledge that our colleague, Mohammed ElBaradei, is coming, and they know what he's coming for and they know he's coming the next day. He's coming to look for things that are prohibited. He is expecting these gentlemen to cooperate with him and not hide things.

But they're worried. **"We have this modified vehicle. What do we say if one of them sees it?"** *What is their concern? Their concern is that it's something they should not have, something that should not be seen.*

The general is incredulous: **"You didn't get a modified. You don't have one of those, do you?" "I have one." "Which, from where?" "From the workshop, from the al-Kindi company?" "What?" "From al-Kindi." "I'll come to see you in the morning. I'm worried. You all have something left." "We evacuated everything. We don't have anything left."** *Note what he says: "We evacuated everything." We didn't destroy it. We didn't line it up for inspection. We didn't turn it into the inspectors. We evacuated it to make sure it was not around when the inspectors showed up.*

"I will come to you tomorrow." *The al-Kindi company: This is a company that is well known to have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity.*

The background information concerning the presented videotapes could be questioned: how these audiotapes were gathered, who the speakers and information gatherers were, what information was left out, and so on. Audiotaped exchanges could also be "staged" and manipulated with modern technology. The contextual information could be wrong or misleading, in which case most people were not in a position to judge. Translation could be an issue, since most of the audience did not speak Arabic. The words "we evacuated everything" referenced earlier might be retranslated as "we do not have anything."[14] However, such issues pertaining to the

[14] See John Hartung, "Who Deceived Colin Powell?" *Foreign Policy Journal*, last modified August 6, 2015, https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/08/06/who-deceived-colin-powell/ (accessed May 30, 2022). The original audio file may be downloaded at https://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/colinpowellunsecuritycouncil.htm (accessed May 30, 2022). Translation issues have been identified by critics regarding another intercepted conversations on "forbidden ammo." According to a report about that conversations, Powell said that one soldier stated: "And we sent you a message yesterday to clean out all of the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas. Make sure there is nothing there." But a critic stated that the words may simply be translated as: "And we sent you a message to inspect the scrap areas and the abandoned areas." Jonathan Schwarz, "Lie After Lie After Lie: What Colin Powell Knew Ten Years Ago Today and What He Said," *HuffPost*, last modified December 06, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/colin-powell-wmd-iraq-war_b_2624620?guccounter=1 (accessed May 30, 2022).

backstage processing never came to surface; they were "taken-as-shared" to be legitimate, presumably because of the authority and integrity that Powell had asserted earlier.

Viewed independently, without Powell's verbal and textual commentaries, what the exchange indicated was not unambiguous. Powell's elaborative comments gave each of these uncertain signs an immediate, clear meaning; each piece of information (a "sub-fact") was a small answer to the broader, unanswered idea of Iraq's WMD possession or capability (an "uncertain fact"). In addition to selecting information, skillful informational placement was important. Placing these pieces of information side by side, many suspicious signs are organized together—and some of them are co-present in a condensed timeframe and setting. In this brief exchange, we can already see "Modified vehicle" appearing *alongside* "the Al-Kindi company" and the phrases "We evacuated everything." "I'm worried" and "I will come to you tomorrow" do not explain what the officer was worried about or what was being planned for the next day. None robust on its own, these uncertain signs (sub-facts) constitute much more robust evidence when viewed together, in a gestalt context. Too many suspicious signs being co-present together—too much circumstantial evidence supporting a hypothetical idea—would seem too extraordinary to be coincidental; in this context, a hypothetical idea that brings forth a cohesive pattern would have better explanatory merits.

Besides informational content and placement, Powell's effective wordsmithing was catalytic in creating fitting ideas to the ambiguous information. Consider the contextualizing commentary offered by Powell: "This is a company [the al-Kindi company] that is *well known* to *have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity.*"

None of the informational elements in this summative statement is technically false. This seemingly ordinary telling of a summative "fact," however, is full of empirical vagueness and caveats.

"Prohibited" is a vague identifier with many potential qualifying references. The asserted prohibitions imposed on Iraq had been numerous, and many were of trivial implications. As long as the specifics of what activities or things were kept very vague, the phrase of someone conducting or hiding "prohibited" things—in an aggregate sense—could be conceived to be applicable to the information.

The phrase "involved in" was another vague, broad, aggregate identifier. How was the al-Kindi company involved—research, intelligence, diplomacy, buying, engineering, repair, disposal, quality control?

Regardless of the extent and capacity of "involvement," the identifier could be applied to the company, and thus a linkage can be established between the company and Iraq's WMDs.

The phrase "having been" is another identifier. It is a time code that could be applied to a very distant past or a very recent one. Yet, using this broad code could suggest a potential for continuing and current connection, even if the actual information may point to an extremely distant past.

"Well known" is aggregate identifier for which information could serve as evidence. After all, the phrase never specifies anything about well known by whom and in which circle, by whose perspective, and how "well" is well.

This sentence is thus devoid of empirical clarity as *five* referentially vague identifiers are used to construct an idea. Yet, this very sentence creates a clear, coherent, gestalt impression of the al-Kindi company's *ideational* identity, and this ideational construct in turn helps to make sense of the ostensibly raw information the interlocutors in the video were trying to "make sure it [the objects related to al-Kindi] was not around when the inspectors showed up." In this manner, the broader assertion of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction thus gained a slice of empirical evidence.

Defectors' Accounts: Detailed Congruities

Beyond the aforementioned information, Powell presented materials that created an impression of factual *convergence*. More information was offered about this modified truck and its potential implications. Powell cited two "eyewitness accounts." The first defector, identified as an "Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised these facilities," had "biological weapons factories on wheels and on rails." While physical facilities could be inspected by the U.N., mobile facilities could conceivably escape a sudden inspection—an idea more fitting than asserting that Iraq's facilities were all physical, as noted the details in this account:

> Although Iraq's mobile production program began in the mid-1990s, U.N. inspectors at the time only had vague hints of such programs. Confirmation came later, in the year 2000. The source was an eyewitness, an Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised one of these facilities. **He actually was present during biological agent production runs. He was also at the site when an accident occurred in 1998**. Twelve technicians died from

exposure to biological agents. He reported that when UNSCOM was in country and inspecting, the biological weapons agent production always began on Thursdays at midnight because Iraq thought UNSCOM would not inspect on the Muslim Holy Day, **Thursday night through Friday**. He added that this was important because **the units could not be broken down in the middle of a production run, which had to be completed by Friday evening before the inspectors might arrive again**.

This account provided some vivid details of empirical events—such as the extraordinary timing of the window between "Thursday night through Friday." After Powell prefaced that this account had come from a defector, or multiple defectors if the account was to be made more credible (due to extraordinary account convergence and an appearance of rigor), he could simply reiterate the many details that this defector said, regardless of this person's credibility or identity, or the influence of incentives to the defector. Implicit in using his account is that the "intelligence community," as a group of experts, deemed this account to be sufficiently trustworthy for Powell to use, or that Powell used his own expertise to select this source to present to the public. In short, backstage manipulation was taken-as-shared to be nonexistent, and background factors of those defectors were judged to be irrelevant to the discussion. Powell further added: "His eye-witness account of these mobile production facilities has been corroborated by other sources." Three such sources were briefly identified with vague descriptors: one was "an Iraqi civil engineer in a position to know the details of the program"; one was simply a person "also in a position to know"; the last one was "an Iraqi major, who defected." When all these sources corroborated a cohesive account of such mobile research and production facilities, an impression of *detailed congruities* was constructed.

Furthermore, defectors' accounts—while rich in visualizing effects—are as hard to disprove as hard as they are to confirm. They are constituted by personal experiences. For an objective event like an earthquake, it can "probably" be disproven by other witnesses being in the same place. But if the subject pertains to a person's behavior—say, whether Person X has been abusive—having ten more people attesting to the positive character of Person X cannot technically "disprove" the horror story told by one eye witness, because the other ten people are not "there." And if the eye witness's account can be embellished by several other fabricated ones—perhaps by incentives and disincentives—the required effort to disprove the claims is even harder. In the case of Iraq, no matter how many

Fig. 15.1 Image display of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) spraying simulated anthrax

interviewees might give disaffirming information, they could not directly entirely disprove the words of the few "defectors."

Adding to visualization, Powell also presented several "diagrammed" graphics[15]—essentially cartoon sketches based on defectors' accounts (not close-up photographs based on real objects). The pictures, with the heading "Mobile Production Facilities for Biological Agents," had called out boxes pointing to different parts of the alleged facilities, labeling those parts as a storage tank, mixing tank, active material tanks, water tank, filling machine, spray dryers, fermentation, and control panel.

Powell then went into length to augment the idea of Iraq's development of anthrax. Materials accompanying his statement included a black-and-white photo of a small plane (drone) flying in the air, assigned with the heading "Iraqi Test Flight Spraying Simulated Anthrax" (see Fig. 15.1):

[15] U. S. Department of State, "Biological Weapons," last modified February 5, 2003, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/photos/2003/17314.htm (accessed May 30, 2022).

The Iraqi regime **has also developed ways** to [disperse] lethal biological agents, widely and discriminately into the water supply, into the air. For example, Iraq **had** a **program** to modify aerial fuel tanks for Mirage jets. This video of an Iraqi test flight obtained by UNSCOM **some years ago** shows an Iraqi F-1 Mirage jet aircraft. Note the spray coming from beneath the Mirage; **that is 2,000 liters of simulated anthrax that a jet is spraying**. In 1995, an Iraqi military officer, Mujahid Sali Abdul Latif (ph), **told** inspectors that Iraq intended the spray tanks to be mounted onto a MiG-21 that had been **converted into an unmanned aerial vehicle**, or a UAV. UAVs outfitted with spray tanks **constitute an ideal method** for launching a terrorist attack using biological weapons.

Grammatical manipulation was used to amass historical events and "facts"—which were empirically validated—to create congruity. One function of grammatical tenses is to specify time, but purposeful manipulation could also be used to hide and obscure a reader's sense of timing.[16] Technically, none of the information Powell stated was incorrect. "Has also developed" could indicate anything from the distant past to an unspecified recent or even the present timeframe. The evidence repeatedly provided about this one piece: "some years ago" was never specified; it could reasonably be interpreted as 5 to 25 years. Then, a defector's statement was provided in 1995. Powell could have said that the video was taken before 1991. And the defector might be referencing that Iraq had the intention to modify before the 1991 Gulf War, not an ongoing intention. But by *not* specifying time frames, it made the empirical statement "has also developed" supportable. Information dating back from decades ago could appear to be congruent with current "facts."[17]

Aside from a few people who knew the detailed contexts and history, such a congruence would look impressively extraordinary. Empirically, Iraq had developed liquid anthrax before the 1991 Gulf War, which had minimal application if it was sprayed, as anthrax was primarily effective through inhalation into the lungs. There was no evidence that Iraq had successfully developed a dried (powdered) form of anthrax, either before 1991 or after. The "simulated anthrax" indicated in the photo was merely

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[16] For details about grammatical manipulation shared by the Bush administration, see Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq: Bush's Reasoning Practices and Argumentation System," *Discourse and Society* 19, no. 4 (July 2008), 468–72.

[17] Empirically, Iraq had developed liquid anthrax before the 1991 Gulf War, which had minimal application if it was sprayed, as anthrax was primarily effective through inhalation into the lungs. There was no evidence that Iraq had successfully developed a dried (powdered) form of anthrax, either before 1991 or after.

an image of *resemblance*, a means to imagine an idealized scenario. Furthermore, if there was never dried anthrax to begin with, the presence of UAVs barely had any significance. Any ambiguous signs of small drones (UAVs) would have been dismissed in terms of their threat. But given the ambiguous signs Powell created for CWs and BWs, partly using grammatical techniques, then presenting visualizable data of, and forging a connection between, ambiguous UAVs and CWs and BWs became significant.

Using Ambiguous Signs in Stepwise Inferencing

There was an art to leaving ambiguous signs as they were, without declaring a definitive meaning, but to still use them systematically in inferencing. Powell modeled a way in which such actions could be carried out. Continuing on the discussion of the subject of drones, Powell stated that intelligence agencies detected that "one of Iraq's newest UAVs in a test flight that went 500 kilometers nonstop on autopilot in the racetrack pattern depicted here." Meanwhile, Iraq declared that it only had a UAV with a range of only 80 km—above the 150 km range that the United Nations permitted. Powell embellished:

> The UAV was flown around and around and around in this circle and so that its 80-kilometer limit really was 500 kilometers, unrefueled and on autopilot.

The discrepancy between intelligence and Iraq's declaration constituted an ambiguous sign. Building on this ambiguous sign, *tentatively supposing* that had this capability, then Powell created a next-step possibility:

> Iraq **could** use these small UAVs which have a wingspan of only a few meters to **deliver biological agents to** its neighbors or, **if transported**, to other countries, including **the United States**.

Other ambiguous signs pertaining to BWs could hardly be connected to an attack on the U.S. soil. The cognitive distance is too high for a reader to bridge. Powell introduced several intermediary, bridging ideas, supplementing each of them with ambiguous information. Thus, the ambiguous sign of one small drone that could remain in the air for 500 km, and which does not need to be mass manufactured, could be of use. However, the distance between Baghdad and Washington, D.C. is a sizeable 9900 km. Therefore, Powell added the idea of the drone being "transported"—intended to be anywhere within 500 km
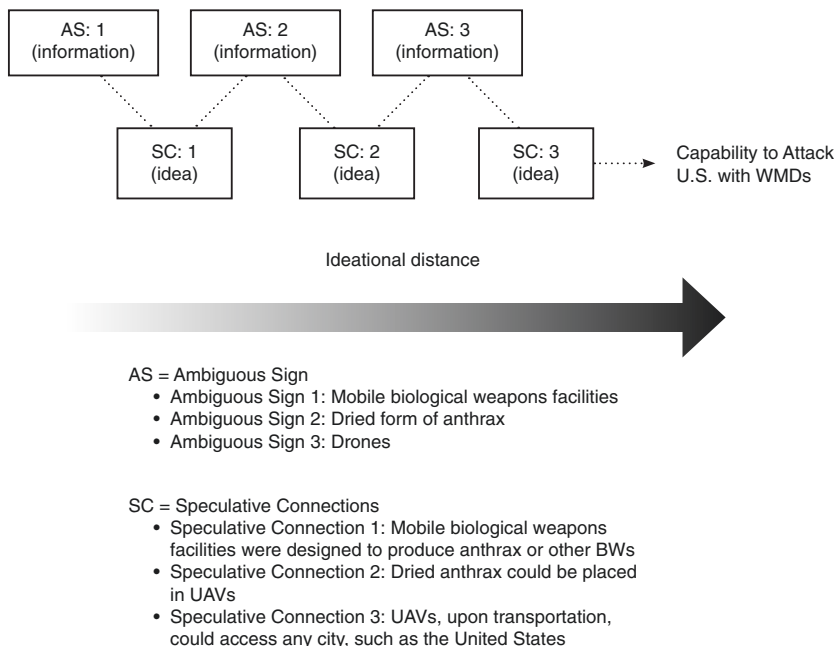
Fig. 15.2   Incremental idea extension through multiple ambiguous signs

radius of the U.S.[18] Here, Powell emphasized the small size ("have a wingspan of only a few meters") presumably because it is much more easily transported than a regular aircraft, and a small number of BWs could cause significant havoc.[19] A pathway of thought, with multiple bridging points as premises, could thus be constructed to cross a long distance. A threat that previously seemed to be located far away became an idea much closer to reality.

This pathway of thought cultivated by Powell had a basic format, as mapped out in Fig. 15.2. Multiple steps of interweaving ambiguous

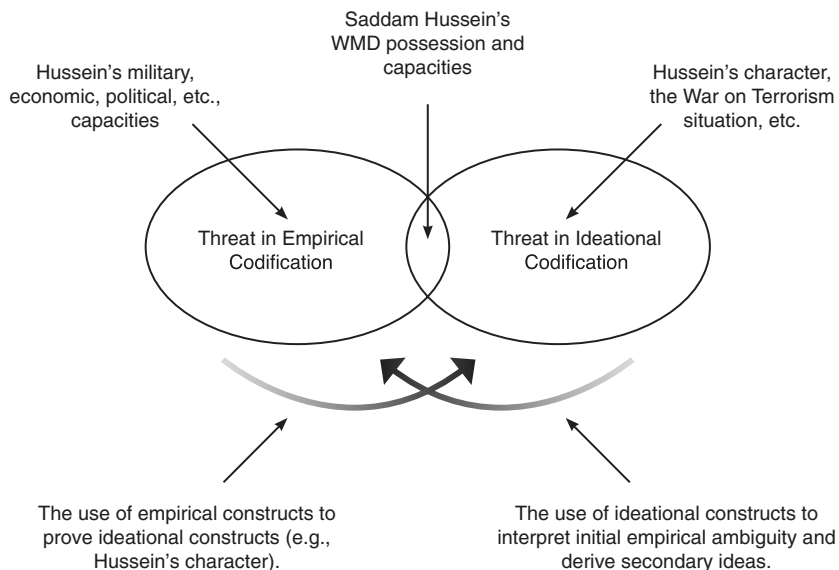[18] For reference purposes, the distance between Cuba and the United States exceeds 2400 km.

[19] Powell, holding up a small vial filled with whitish powder, described the significance of a small amount of anthrax: "Less than a teaspoon of dry anthrax, a little bit—about this amount. This is just about the amount of a teaspoon. Less than a teaspoonful of dry anthrax in an envelope shut down the United States Senate in the fall of 2001. This forced several hundred people to undergo emergency medical treatment and killed two postal workers just from an amount, just about this quantity that was inside of an envelope."

empirical signs and speculative connections (informed by ideational premises) could be built on each item. A conversation about an "evacuated truck" [AS1] could be connected to BWs through a defector's account of mobile BW production facility [AS2] by speculative connection by Powell (e.g., "What is their concern? Their concern is that it's something they should not have…"), and the specific mentioning of Al-Kindi was further speculatively connected to prohibited BWs (e.g., "The Al-Kindi company… is well known to have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity"). For the production of BWs, Powell claimed, in one sentence, "Iraq's procurement efforts include: equipment that can filter and separate microorganisms and toxins involved in biological weapons [AS1]; equipment that can be used to concentrate the agent; growth media that can be used to continue producing anthrax and botulinum toxin [AS2]; sterilization equipment for laboratories [AS4]; glass-lined reactors and specialty pumps that can handle corrosive chemical weapons agents and precursors [AS5]; large amounts of thionyl chloride, a precursor for nerve and blister agents [AS6]; and other chemicals such as sodium sulfide, an important mustard agent precursor [AS7]." All of these items could well be multipurpose equipment, as Powell acknowledged; for example, a "specialty pump" made to handle corrosive chemicals could also be used to handle "corrosive chemical weapons agents." But it rested on Powell to make speculative connections that otherwise could not be made.

At the macro scale, there was more information on suspicious items connected to WMDs. The whole presentation covered more than just this chain and consists of modified trucks, BWs, and UAVs—but also conversations about "forbidden ammo" and "nerve gas," aluminum tubes of an extraordinary nature. The suspected aluminum tubes, for example, were "manufactured to a tolerance that far exceeds U.S. requirements for comparable rockets" and "an anodized coating on extremely smooth inner and outer surfaces." And then there were attempts to link Iraq with actual terrorist groups.

Hybrid Codification Processes: Imbricating Ideational Codification into Empirical Codification

The vast chain-complexes of ideas simultaneously operated on both empirical and ideational codifications. A "fact" derived from empirical data—estimated empirical possibility, a description of an unusual phenomenon—which could then be linked to one or two ideational mechanisms,

Saddam Hussein's
WMD possession and
capacities

Hussein's military,
economic, political, etc.,
capacities

Hussein's character,
the War on Terrorism
situation, etc.

Threat in Empirical
Codification

Threat in Ideational
Codification

The use of empirical constructs to
prove ideational constructs (e.g.,
Hussein's character).

The use of ideational constructs to
interpret initial empirical ambiguity and
derive secondary ideas.

Fig. 15.3   Hybrid codification of Iraq's threat

which are then linked to two or other empirical "facts." The hybrid codi-
fication enabled a much further distance to be bridged.

The alternation between these two codifications could be seen in the
last figure (Fig. 15.3), as "speculative connections" were often made with
assumptions and ideas that are accepted to be valid, or at least intelligible.
Not all speculative connections were ideational, but some of them—such
as those involving intent and probability—subtly enabled speculative con-
nections to be made. The primary resource enabling an ideational mode
of codification was the War on Terrorism script.

Even from the previous example, we can see that, when looking at the
ambiguous data, Powell uses what he saw from the intercepted conversa-
tion to support an ideational construct—for example, Iraq was hiding
things. He also used ideational constructs to speculate on possibilities:
that an attack on the U.S. was possible. But to increase the likelihood of
such a scenario, Powell also presented a chained connection between Iraq
and terrorist networks.

Displaying Nation-Terrorist Connections

The codification techniques to demonstrate an Iraq-WMDs relation are also used to demonstrate an Iraq-Terrorist connection. I have discussed Powell's general techniques extensively elsewhere. Generally, many extraordinary coincidental patterns and uncertain signs that were unlikely to occur naturally were presented. The information encompassed suspected terrorists meeting Hussein's officials, being harbored in Baghdad, or receiving medical treatment. A collaborative relationship between Iraq and Al-Qaeda thus stood as an extraordinarily fitting external cause. One example clearly illustrates how ideational codifications are imbricated into empirical sense-making.

> Some believe, **some claim these contacts do not amount to much**. They say Saddam Hussein's secular tyranny and Al Qaida's religious tyranny do not mix. I am not comforted by this thought. **Ambition and hatred are enough to bring Iraq and Al Qaida together**, enough so Al Qaida could learn how to build more sophisticated bombs and learn how to forge documents, and enough so that Al Qaida **could turn to Iraq for help** in acquiring expertise on weapons of mass destruction.[20]

Power conflicts and value differences between Al-Qaeda and Hussein were ignored by Powell; instead, the shared character of the enemy—that is, "ambition and hatred"—was said to be enough of a motivation to transcend their differences and to unite in common endeavors to build bombs, forge documents, and acquire WMDs. A case for Iraq's grave threat was produced—by Powell's skillful, integrative, and synergistic uses of both evidentiary and ideational modes of codification to construct ideas.

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[20] "U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses the U.N. Security Council," transcript, The White House, accessed March 15, 2020, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives. gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.html.

INTEGRATIVE ARGUMENTS DELIVERED
TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

It is worth noting that Powell's presentation to the U.N. Security Council—while somewhat incoherent—was significantly more systematic and detailed than Bush's presentation during his speeches to the American people from September 2003 to March 2004. The following quote succinctly represents how Bush would normally make his case to the American public:

> One of the greatest dangers we face is that weapons of mass destruction might be passed to terrorists, who would not hesitate to use those weapons. **Saddam Hussein has longstanding, direct and continuing ties to terrorist networks.** Senior members of Iraqi intelligence and al Qaeda **have met at least eight times** since the early 1990s. Iraq **has sent** bomb-making and document forgery experts to work with al Qaeda. Iraq **has also** provided al Qaeda with chemical and biological weapons training. **We also know** that Iraq **is harboring** a terrorist network, headed by a senior al Qaeda terrorist planner. The network runs a poison and explosive training center in northeast Iraq, and **many of its leaders are known to be in Baghdad.** The head of this network **traveled to Baghdad for medical treatment** and **stayed for months**. Nearly two dozen associates joined him there and have been **operating in Baghdad** for more than eight months.[21]

The aforementioned statements weaved many allegations together. In contrast to Powell's U.N. presentation, Bush did not usually publicly divulge the sources of his allegations; he merely mentioned them one after another as if they were a list of known facts. Powell at least specified, occasionally, select details of intelligence sources. However, the idea-making techniques were very similar to Powell's; the information provided was in reality based on questionable intelligence information, and many events (e.g., terrorists staying in Baghdad) were treated as solid evidence of Iraq-terrorist ties. The codification activities were very similar.

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[21] George W. Bush, "Remarks on the Iraqi Regime's Noncompliance with United Nations Resolutions 164–165," Roosevelt Room, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 39, no. 6 (February 6, 2003), 164–65.