



On the foreign policy community and the international relations academy in 2002

By: Daniel W. Drezner - February 21, 2013

My Twitter feed has been abuzz with a 2009 Justin Logan blog post about the puzzling disconnect between the international relations academy and the foreign policy community in Washington:

[T]he two groups have been wildly at variance in terms of their views on important public policy issues. Take the Iraq war, for example. As anyone who was in Washington at the time knows, the FPC was extremely fond of the idea of invading Iraq. To oppose it was to marginalize oneself for years....

In the academy, meanwhile, there was hardly any debate over Iraq almost 80 percent of IR academics opposed the war. [.pdf] To the extent academics did enter the public debate on the issue, it was to pay for an advertisement in the New York Times warning against the war. [.pdf] The only academics who spoke out in favor of the war (to my knowledge, anyway) were IR liberals like Anne-Marie Slaughter, who sought policy positions in Washington....

My sense is that the giant national-security bureaucracy in Washington that has emerged over the last 65 years has shaped incentives in a manner such that it is next-to-impossible to “get ahead” by advocating for restraint. Put differently, restraint isn’t in anybody’s interest except the country’s, and there’s nobody in Washington representing broad national interests as opposed to their own parochial ones. Every neoconservative or liberal imperialist in DC has someone’s interests behind them.

Read the whole thing.

My take: I’m one of the 20% of academics who (regretfully) supported the Iraq War, so feel free to discount my take. First of all, I’ve always been dubious of that 80% figure -- it’s based on a survey conducted in 2005 asking what their attitudes were in 2003. Maybe everyone was honest about this, but I recall a fair number of colleagues voicing some sympathy for Operation Iraqi Freedom in early 2003. Logan is right to point out the divergence -- I’m just not sure it was as stark as he makes it. More generally, methinks Logan is trying to fit a structural explanation onto a more transient divergence. My explanations for the divergence are based on a more prosaic three-step explanation:

- 1) All politicians want to be president;
- 2) All members of the foreign policy community want to be a foreign policy principal;
- 3) In 2002, what haunted the memory of politicians were the presidential candidates who self-destructed in 1991 for voting against Gulf War I. Immediately after 9/11, no politician who had a future wanted to be seen as soft on war.

On the other hand, if Logan is right, then the foreign policy community should be united in dispatching military force at every opportunity since Iraq. That's not how it's played out, however. A lot of think-tankers opposed the surge in Iraq, as well as operations in Libya. I don't see overwhelming support for action in Syria either.

Logan says he has a longer paper, which I look forward to reading. But I hope he's able to demonstrate that the gap between the foreign policy community and international relations academy has been long-lasting, and is not merely an artifact of 2002.