

BEYOND “MIGHT IS RIGHT”: RETHINKING THE US INVASION OF IRAQ AND LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY PEACE AND SECURITY

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“Small states may be able to adapt to, even temporarily profit from, band-wagoning with the hegemon, but it is they that are potentially most threatened when a hegemonic power undermines the international constraints on the use of power”

(Hinnebusch, 2006: 114).

“The most important difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil”

(Wright, 2003).

Introduction

The United States (US) led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was and continues to be controversial throughout the domestic and international community, with wide contestations among scholars as to whether or not the US was justified in its initial decision to invade. The scale of the invasion coupled with the chaos and instability suffered by Iraq in the aftermath raises questions on the legality and morality of the act. Within the prism of the law, the question as to whether the US could rightfully invade without explicit UN authorization has always surfaced in the discourses on the war. In fact, opinions on the 2003 Iraqi war are deeply divided between nations. As part of the justifications of the invasion, some states felt that Saddam Hussein and his regime are one of the worst despots the world had ever witnessed. Therefore, it remains an obligation to remove brutal dictators and establish democracy and its values (Palmer, 2005). This stance was distributed by most US media channels and right-wing politicians who promoted that the war was to establish democracy in Iraq and grant Iraqis a better life instead. On the other side, some arguments are premised on the opinion that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was an act of imperialism and the only justification for the US to invade was to acquire Iraq's oil (Everest, 2004). Yet, President Bush claimed that: “In Iraq, a dictator is building and hiding weapons that could enable him to dominate the Middle East and intimidate the civilized world -- and we will not allow it (Al Taie, 2016). However, the US maintained that it invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein and his regime for alleged ties to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization as well as for

acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Subsequently, no evidence emerged to prove that Iraq was in possession of WMD amidst a backdrop of rising violence, breakdown of political and economic reconstruction and intensifying sectarian divisions. The invasion thus became a litmus test of right and wrong war with an abundance of opinions coming its way, both in favour of and against it.

Most critical among the arguments presented by the literature on the US decision to invade Iraq is that despite a glaring lack of evidence to justify the right to go to war with Iraq, the US still carried on with the act. The decision was not based on intelligence information but rather on US arrogance in assuming supremacy in world politics (Galbraith, 2007). More so, Iraq remains a strategic state in the Middle East given its sectarian make-up and ethnic mosaic, fragile and complex internal politics, as well as significant energy resources reserves (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016). This points to an important recurrent point of this work that stresses on the violation of political sovereignty and territorial integrity of weaker states by their mighty and powerful counterparts. In the light of the foregoing, this article raises key research questions as follows- Can one state alone dictate terms to the whole community of nations merely because it is politically, economically and militarily supreme? What position does the 'sovereign equality' of states as affirmed in the UN Charter hold and mean? This article therefore aims at bringing this war back on stage to raise the very important question of how and why this war has been waged, and interrogate some of the real purposes and motivations behind the war. Clarifying the connection on why strong states do what they can while weak states suffer what they must is critical not only to advancing the debate on war and conflict but also to understanding the implications or otherwise, of the uncontested struggle for power, dominance and hegemony by states in international politics. This article builds on the widely established argument that it is the developing world, above all, that bear the main brunt of state weakness and its attendant spillovers.

Theoretical Framework

This article adopts the Realist Theory as it deems suitable in explaining the US invasion of Iraq and its motives related to national security, power and resources. In particular, the Offensive Realist model is considered more appropriate in underpinning the aims and objectives of this work. Historically speaking, the master scholars that contributed to the development and growth of this approach are Thucydides, T. Hobbes, and N. Machiavelli. Through the concept of Realism, they emphasized on the significance of power, hegemony, military force, interests and security issues in international relations. It also succinctly analyzes the phenomena of war and why states act the way they do. From the realist perspective, decisions by states to go to war are the product of all states' involuntary participation in eternal quests for power and security due to an international political environment in which each states fear the actual or potential hostility of other states. As captured by Jack Donnelly, "Realism provides a theoretical account of how the world works. It can be used for peaceful purposes, as well as for war". He adds that "Power is the currency of great-power politics, while hegemony is directed by great power and self-

interest (Donnelly, 1995: 182). Joseph S. Nye further established that “Realism portrays the world in terms of sovereign states aiming to preserve their security, with military force as their ultimate instrument. As a consequence, war has been a constant aspect of international affairs over centuries (Nye, 2004). This denotes the notion that the Realists consider the principal players in the international political arena to be sovereign states, who are concerned with their own security, thus act in pursuit of their own strategic national interests and quest for power. Thus, the interests of the state predominate over all other interests and values.

Specifically, the analysis of the article will be presumed on the assumptions of Offensive Realism which provides compelling answers to the behaviors of states and their actions in the international system to be channeled towards being a hegemony and gain the power to ensure their interests in the world (Toft, 2005). According to Mearsheimer (2007), great powers, are perpetually seeking ways to gain power over their rivals, towards the ultimate goal of hegemony, and that states always want to acquire some military capacity to enable them hurt and possibly destroy each other. Based on this assumption, he concludes that the most efficient method for states to ensure their survival in anarchy is to maximize their relative capacity of power with the ultimate purpose of becoming the superior power and the sole hegemonic power in the globe. From the offensive realism viewpoint, the most significant question regarding the invasion of Iraq, is understood and explained to be a case of the doctrine and policy that the United States arrogates to itself the right to attack or invade any country in the world without pretext, justifications or international authorization or legitimacy (MacMahan, 2010). The Bush administration was forthright about its goal of global hegemony that Bush’s (2002) West Point speech declared, “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge.” Given this strategic objective, overthrowing Saddam Hussein’s government can be understood as an effort to enhance U.S. reputational and symbolic power beyond challenge—particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks that might have made the U.S. appear vulnerable.

In order to address why Iraq in particular was targeted, realism would also point to Iraq’s geostrategic location, which impinged on multiple security concerns of the U.S., and to Iraq’s nearly unsurpassed oil resources, which it could potentially deploy against U.S. interests. Military bases in Iraq would enable the U.S. to project its power further into the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, and could replace the less secure bases that the U.S. established in Saudi Arabia after the 1999 Gulf war (United States Department of Defense, 2003). Thus, in realist terms, the invasion was a rational means for the U.S. to achieve its primary goal of demonstrating its power to allies and competitors alike, and of avoiding the appearance of post-9/11 decline. As well, it was intended to prevent Iraq’s actual or potential use of WMD and oil resources to threaten the U.S. or its allies, and to prevent Iraq’s potential collaboration with anti-U.S. terrorist groups. A secondary motive for the overthrow of the Iraqi regime, from a realist perspective, would be to increase the security of Israel, the main U.S. regional ally. In asserting that “the road to Jerusalem goes through Baghdad,” Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz (United States Department of Defense, 2003) and other officials assumed that loss of Iraqi patronage would lessen Palestinian

militancy in the conflict with Israel and facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian accord on terms acceptable to Israel. The administration also hoped that a U.S. presence in Iraq would put pressure on Syria, which both the U.S. and Israel considered an enemy government. The U.S. military could also use its bases in post-war Iraq, along with existing U.S. bases in Afghanistan, to pressure Iran to end its nuclear program, or even to help effect regime change in Teheran (Gordon, 2004). Beyond the goal of symbolically establishing or re-establishing hegemony, the invasion would support the projection of U.S. power into southwest Asia and beyond, helping to contain and pressure hostile governments.

Power Asymmetry: Weak States Versus Strong States

The rise and fall of nation-states is not new, but in modern times when national states constitute the building blocks of legitimate world order, the violent disintegration and palpable weakness of some states threaten the very foundation of that system. States are much more varied in their capacity and capability than they once were. They are more numerous than they were a half century ago, and the range of their population sizes, physical endowments, wealth, productivity, delivery systems, ambitions, and attainments is much more extensive than ever before. Nation-states exist to provide a decentralized method of delivering political (public) goods to persons living within designated parameters (borders) (Blatter, 2001). States succeed or fail across all or some of these dimensions. But it is according to their performance—according to the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial political goods—that strong states may be distinguished from weak ones, and weak states from failed or collapsed states. There is a hierarchy of political goods. None is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security. The state's prime function is to provide that political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion (Haas, 2008).

Strong states obviously perform well across these categories and with respect to each, separately. Weak states show a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others. The more poorly weak states perform, criterion by criterion, the weaker they become, and the more that weakness tends to edge toward failure, hence the subcategory of weakness that is termed failing. Strong states unquestionably control their territories and deliver a full range and a high quality of political goods to their citizens. They perform well according to indicators like GDP per capita, the UNDP Human Development Index, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, and Freedom House's Freedom of the World Report. Strong states offer high levels of security from political and criminal violence, ensure political freedom and civil liberties, and create environments conducive to the growth of economic opportunity (Rotberg, 2002). Weak states include a broad continuum of states that are: inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but

temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two. Weak states typically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent. In weak states, the ability to provide adequate measures of other political goods is diminished or diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks have deteriorated. GDP per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling, sometimes dramatically; levels of venal corruption are high and escalating.

It has become commonplace to assert that the gravest dangers to U.S. and world security are no longer military threats from rival great powers but transnational threats emanating from the world's most poorly governed countries. "Since the end of the Cold War, weak and failing states have arguably become the single most important problem for international order," (Fukuyama, 2004). Nations that are incapable of exercising "responsible sovereignty," says Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, have a "spillover effect" in the form of terrorism, weapons proliferation and other dangers (Patrick, 2006). This new focus on weak and failing states represents an important shift in U.S. threat perceptions. Before 9/11, U.S. policymakers viewed states with sovereignty deficits primarily through a humanitarian lens: they piqued our moral conscience but possessed little strategic significance. Al Qaeda's ability to act with impunity from Afghanistan changed this calculus, convincing the Bush Administration that "the United States today is threatened less by conquering states than we are by weak and failing ones." (Crocker, 2003). This new threat perception has quickly become conventional wisdom. Government officials, academics and the media have linked poorly performing developing countries to a vast array of threats to global security and well-being, from transnational terrorism to international crime, humanitarian catastrophes, regional instability, global pandemics, mass migration and environmental degradation (Hamre & Sullivan, 2002). This new strategic orientation has already begun to have policy and institutional consequences.

Iraq Before the Invasion: Brief History and Ties with the U.S

The discussion of the 2003 invasion of Iraq will be incomplete without offering a historical background to the pre-invasion period. Iraq was a grand terrain of an illustrious civilization which practiced mutual co-existence centuries before the Western world even came into existence. A Middle Eastern country bordering Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and Iran, Iraq has a proud history that boasts roots dating back to the dawn of human civilization. In ancient times it was called Mesopotamia, and had an advanced system of ruling characterized by city-states that were gradually integrated into empires (Held, 1992). Iraq was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for over four centuries. The country was under foreign authority until 1932 when the League of Nations granted it independence. Following World War, I, Britain was appointed mandatory power under the new system of international trusteeship established by the League of Nations (Gorman, 2005).

Nationalism started in 1918 when an Iraqi nationalist movement rose against British rule. As the notion of a new joined citizenship arose across the country after the

independence, almost every city in Iraq comprised a mixture of Muslims -- Shiite and Sunni -- Christians, and (until the late sixties, and mostly in Baghdad) Jews. Inapt economic and social reforms introduced by the British made the Iraqis rebel against British rule in 1920, which made the British alter their policy towards Iraq by way of establishing an independent Iraqi state tied to Britain through treaties that served the best interests of Britain (Fabal, 2015). Then in 1921, Iraq became a constitutional monarchy with the crowning of Faisal, son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca (Kandell, 2003). Though being able to achieve socio-economic development, the monarchy pathetically failed to ensure social cohesion and fight divisions within Iraq, amongst which the Kurdish issue and the Sunni-Shi'i rivalry topped the list. Over the years' different rulers of this royal line were able to gain more power and abuse it. Apart from internal antagonisms, the monarchy was also accused of corruption and oppression. As a result, following the end of World War II, a public frustration erupted into a revolution that called for reform, and in 1958, a military coup toppled the monarchy (Allawi, 2004).

The new military regime under General Qasim was Republican in form and introduced a new reformist agenda that erased even the slightest traces of the old regime. Despite being instrumental in introducing an array of popular reforms, Qasim, like any other ruler with a massive power concentration, showed signs of becoming a dictator. In 1968, the Baath party came into power. The Baath party primarily had a Shi'i base and drove the country into totalitarianism (Lecamwasam, 2013). Throughout 1970s the Baath party was able to gradually secure support and to strengthen its power base in Iraq. In 1979, Vice President Saddam Hussein became the country's ruler after the resignation of President Al-Bakr (Karsh & Rautsi, 2002). Saddam Hussein was Iraq's only commonality and unyielding structure the country needed. Under the iron-clad dictatorship of Saddam Hussein from 1979 to 2003, the Iraqis faced absolute oppression which manifested in the crushing of opposition and using brute force and state propaganda by Hussein to secure his power. Apart from these coldblooded policies, the regime was also defined by aggression to foreign powers (Bozo, 2016). Saddam Hussein assumed office in a context where distaste towards the US in the Middle East was being more freely expressed, especially after the overthrowing of the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran, the pillar of the US in the Middle East. Immediately after coming into power, Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 due to a border dispute, providing the US with an opportunity to intervene. The US, seeing the wisdom in fuelling the fire, supported Iraq and backed all her decisions, even to the extent of defending Iraq for her use of chemical weapons against Iran at the UN. The US, seeking a path into the Middle East, viewed the Iran-Iraq war as a perfect opportunity to become a stakeholder in the issue and thus get a hold, however insignificant, on the region (Thakur, & Sidhu, 2006).

During the Iran-Iraq war, the ratios of military expenditures to the GDP had been higher: in 1975 it was 22.5, but during the war it was 66.0. The increase in the ratio of military spending caused inflation which further caused living standards to fall (Friedman, 1993). The Iraqi population experienced a significant reduction in their standard of living, which was at a much lower level than at the beginning of the war in 1980. They also

suffered daily food shortages and high inflation. The reduction in the standard of living weakened political support for the ruling Baath Party and put Iraqi decision makers in a loss frame. Saddam's strong political base was the public-sector employees which consisted of approximately 30 percent of the civilian population and 50 percent of the total population. In the economic hard times, government departments were ordered to cut the size of their staffs by 50 percent. This weakened Saddam's political base and began to threaten the survival of the regime (Bengio, 1992). After ending its eight-year war, Iraq introduced such massive and dramatic economic liberalization and privatization programs that it could be recognized as the most wide-ranging privatization programs in developing countries (El-Naggar, 1989). But these reforms could not get what Iraqi decision makers wanted. The failure of economic reform plunged the Iraqi economy into such chaos that domestic political stability was threatened. Moreover, debt payments, military spending and termination of foreign credits sources dried up foreign exchange to expand domestic production. Again, oil was recognized as the only available source for foreign exchange. When the war ended, the estimated reconstruction cost was as high as \$60 billion (Chaudhry, 1991).

In 2003, Hussein's rule came to an end with him being ousted by a US led coalition. An in-depth analysis of the actual reasons behind the invasion shall be discussed in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

The 2003 US Invasion of Iraq: Unveiling Stated and Actual Motives

The international political scene prior to US invasion depicted that the policy efforts of containment was making way for removing the Iraqi regime (Schmidt & Williams, 2008). The President Bush's instructions to develop a plan for war were given to the Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld on November 2001. This suggests that the decision was taken two years prior to the war, with all preparation by the Bush administration and Blair Cabinet to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussain and replace the whole regime. Although the main instruments of foreign policy available to decision makers includes political, economic, cultural/ideological and military which all help them to translate their intentions into actions (Dunne et al, 2021), the U.S opted for military option. In March 2003, several days before the war, President Bush offered Saddam Hussain and his sons a 48-hour ultimatum to leave Iraq. On 19 March the war started, through the heavy bombing of Baghdad, which shocked the world (Brim, 2003). By 9 April 2003, the U.S. Marine Corps entered Baghdad. Saddam's statue was toppled, marking the symbolic end of the military operations, and officially declaring the occupation of Iraq (Griffin, 2004). They called this war Operation Iraqi Freedom. About 300,000 US and British troops were involved in the invasion (Bassil, 2012). Soon after the declaration, Iraq steeped into violence against both American soldiers and Iraqis who supported them. Though the US found it easy to emerge victorious in the early phase, the situation soon turned out to be chaotic. Due to sloppy security arrangements, violence soon took to the streets and prowling became the norm. The war formally ended in August 2010 with President Obama's declaration that America's combat mission was over (Al Taie, 2016).

The US and UK Stated Justifications for the Invasion

The actual purpose of the US-led invasion of Iraq had been debatable, since there were many hidden agendas in the Bush administration offensive against Iraq. Assumptions about the purpose of the attack have been diverse while the actual motive behind the war remains blurred. However, some of the publicly stated motives and the actual motives would be discussed in this section as both are of simultaneous importance.

(I) Al-Qaeda and its Link to the Iraqi Regime

In order to grasp the complex and multidimensional factors that contributed to the decision of the 2003 war by the US and the UK, it is important to examine post 9/11 US foreign policy. There were many intelligence reports asserted that al Qaeda would be unable to organize an attack like 11 September without a state sponsor. Some in the Bush administration felt that Iraq was involved (Kelly et al, 2016), or that they were planning for the next attack on the US. According to them, Saddam used foreign terrorist groups as an instrument of foreign policy. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks of the United States, otherwise known as the 9/11 Commission, which was set up in the wake of the September 11 attacks, dealt extensively with the issue of Iraq's support of terrorism. During its third public hearing, it interviewed Judith S. Yaphe, a Distinguished Research Fellow for the Middle East in the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS). On July 9th 2003, she stated that "my testimony focuses on the role and actions of Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism under the control of Saddam Husayn. Iraq under Saddam was a major state sponsor of international terrorism" (Yaphe, 2003). She went on to add that:

Baghdad actively sponsored terrorist groups, providing safe haven, training, arms, and logistical support, requiring in exchange that the groups carry out operations ordered by Baghdad for Saddam's objectives. Terrorist groups were not permitted to have offices, recruitment, or training facilities or freely use territory under the regime's direct control without explicit permission from Saddam.

Though no direct link was established between Iraq and the Al-Qaeda, following the 9/11 attacks, Iraq was included in the US's agenda of War on Terror as an enemy state. President Bush, placing Iraq, Iran and North Korea on an Axis of Evil, sought justification to invade Iraq. In June 2003, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence began a formal review of U.S. intelligence into existence of Iraqi's ties to the terrorist group. One of its conclusions was:

The investigations of the Committee show that the intelligence failures leading up to the war in Iraq were serious and pervasive. So were the failures prior to the September 11 attacks. While the investigations will continue, reform must begin. There can be no delay when the safety and security of America and Americans are at stake (Davies, 2004).

Apparently, after more than a decade, there is still no concrete evidence that Iraqi regime had a link or any kind of cooperation with this terrorist organization. Despite the fact that US forces arrested and investigated many of the officers in Saddam Hussein's intelligence service after the occupation of Iraq, they didn't find any evidence proving that the Iraqi regime had any kind of link to al-Qaeda. However, they did find information that Iraqi regime had a troubled relation with Al Qaeda with Iraqi security agency even arresting and imprisoning a number of its members before the war.

(II) *Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)*

During the Cold War era, only nation states possessed the capability to inflict large scale damage, but in the post-Cold War world, with the democratization of technology, small groups of people not bound to any specific state could inflict catastrophic damage (Tschirgi, 2007). The emphasis, therefore, was no longer on these groups alone, but also on their possible sponsors. At the top of this list were countries which had grievances with the United States, had links to terrorist organizations, were located in the Muslim Middle East, had WMD or the ability to manufacture them, and had used them in the past. The one country which stood out more than most was Iraq. As expressed by President Bush, "Saddam Hussein is hiding dangerous weapons and is defying the United Nations" (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003). In his 2002 State of the Union which laid out US strategy, President Bush reiterated that:

The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world (Schmidt & Williams, 2008).

In the opinion of Wright and Hopper (2005: 8), "Iraq's history with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons is a long and winding path that eventually ended in the American invasion of the country". This is as a result of the circumstances that prevailed before the invasion. On June 7th 1981, Israeli warplanes launched a surprise attack on the French built Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad by claiming that Iraq was building a nuclear weapon which it could use against Israel (Wright and Hopper, 2005). Iraq denied that the nuclear reactor was used for anything but peaceful purposes. In 1983, Iraq used chemical weapons in its war with Iran, which lasted from 1980 to 1988. Afterwards, on April 3rd 1991, after Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait following the first gulf war, "the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed its first resolution addressing Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. Resolution 687 stated that Iraq must destroy its presumed stockpile of WMD, and the means to produce them" (Wright and Hopper, 2005: 23). In May 1992, Iraq admitted it had so called "defensive" biological weapons, the destruction of which was halted when UN inspectors were denied access to Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture (Wright and Hopper, 2005).

On December 16th 1998, a four-day air campaign by the US began to strike military and security targets in Iraq that contributed to Iraq's ability to produce, store, maintain and deliver weapons of mass destruction (Wright and Hopper, 2005). This US campaign was known as Operation Desert Fox and was considered to have finished off what was left of Iraq's WMD Infrastructure. Finally, on November 8th 2002, UN resolution 1441 claimed that Iraq was still in material breach of other UN resolutions and gave Saddam one more chance to comply (Wright and Hopper, 2005). Weapons inspectors re-entered the country and, although they did not find any WMD, the US maintained that Saddam was hiding them and covering up an active programme to produce them. The Bush administration sought the assistance of the UN Security Council to authorize an attack on Iraq since they claimed to have intelligence on Iraq's WMD proliferation but failed to get the Council's endorsement. Having failed that, US formed a coalition with willing states and invaded Iraq on 19th March 2003 despite heavy opposition from most of the UN member states. In short, the accusations and allegations against Iraqi regime were weak. Nearly two years after the invasion of Iraq, Charles Duelfer, leader of the investigative Iraq Survey Group, reported that the search for weapons of mass destruction had been given up and that no stockpiles of weapons had existed in Iraq when Coalition forces invaded (Pearson: 2005).

(III) *Establishment of Democracy in Iraq*

Under the iron-clad dictatorship of Saddam Hussein from 1979 to 2003, the Iraqis faced absolute oppression which manifested in the crushing of opposition and using brute force and state propaganda by Hussein to secure his power. Apart from these policies, the regime was also defined by aggression to foreign powers (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013). The idea that war would bring democracy to the Middle East was no more than just propaganda. This time with the naive expectations that the transition to a "friendly" democratic new government would be quick and easy, and that Iraq would become a secular democratic model that would urge the region and the whole Middle East to transform too (Byman & Pollack, 2003). However, quite unfortunately, the result was counterproductive, thereby triggering massive popular support for radical terrorism (Diamond, 2006). According to Joseph Biden, the then US Vice President: "It is increasingly clear that President Bush does not have a strategy for victory in Iraq. Rather, he hopes to prevent defeat and pass the problem along to his successor (Leffler, 2013). Thus, after the US forces left the country regarding the then President Obama's decision, Iraq had functioned as a failed democracy. In quite a related vein, the power vacuum in Iraq plus the wrong post-war American planning produced the chaos and instability that followed suit in the country. Hence, the American democracy project in Iraq failed. Added to this, the harm the invasion caused the Iraqis outweighed the good it could have done. If the despotism of Hussein was a nightmare to most Iraqis, the civil war period that followed the invasion was a real horror. A deadly insurgency characterized by car bombings and assassinations that ravaged Iraq roughly through 2006 to 2008 made the country's situation further deteriorate despite the presence of coalition troops (Rayburn, 2014).

Actual Motives: Hegemony, Oil, and the Political Interests of Bush's Coalition

Despite the UN's disapproval for the invasion of Iraq and general lack of evidence of Saddam Hussein's nuclear initiative, including the falsehood that Saddam Hussein had ties to Al-Qaeda, and would use his weapons of mass destruction on US cities (Jervis, 2006), the Bush administration went ahead to invade Iraq. It is evident that the US used its hegemonic control and misconstrued social constructs about Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction and Al-Qaeda to justify the invasion of Iraq. However, the Actual motives behind the US invasion of Iraq can be properly understood from the prism of the following levels of analysis:

(I) The US Grand Strategy of Global Hegemony

The starting point for understanding the invasion of Iraq is the grand strategy of the US under Bush to undertake a coercive assertion of global hegemony. The Bush doctrine and the 2002 National Security Strategy, formulated in response to the 9/11 attacks, make explicit the coercive turn; the call for "full spectrum dominance"; the strategy of dealing with resistance to the US not simply through traditional containment, but via "preventive wars"; the resort to unilateralism, with ad-hoc "coalitions of the willing"; the view that states not with the US in the war on terrorism are against it; and the claim that only the US liberal model is legitimate, with sovereignty exempting no nation from the demand that it conform (Krahmann, 2005). This, of course, is all quite a change from traditional US foreign policy which was based on the containment of threats. By contrast, the architects of the Bush administration strategy had long advocated a strategy of hegemony based on the use of American's exceptional military capabilities (Hinnebusch, 2007).

ii) The US Grand Strategy in the Middle East

Reshaping the Middle East is pivotal to the success of the US quest for global hegemony. One of the main pillars of US global hegemony is its protectorate over the "world" oil reserves concentrated in the Persian Gulf. Oil is a strategic commodity that everybody needs and is crucial to military power while assuring its flow to the world economy makes US power globally indispensable (Roy, 2008). On the other hand, the war on Iraq was expected to decisively assert the military dimension of hegemony. Smashing Saddam Hussein, who had famously defied the US, would send the message that the limits of American military power had been overcome. Bush wanted to establish the right to attack countries the US deemed threats and Iraq, being both weak and easily demonized, was an exemplary case to establish the precedent. An easy victory in Iraq followed by images of Iraqis welcoming U.S. troops as liberators would demoralize Arab/Islamic opposition to US hegemony.⁹ The US had long sought permanent bases in the Gulf and conquering Iraq would allow their establishment (Cockburn & Cockburn, 2002). From this Iraqi base, the US could intimidate remaining resistance from nationalist states like Syria and Iran and impose a pro-Israeli Pax-Americana in the region. And, invading Iraq would

allow the imposition of liberalism there and, in a domino effect, spread to the rest of the Middle East, undermining ideologies and regimes inimical to American influence (Pollack et al, 2011).

(III) *The Interests of Bush's Ruling Coalition*

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the US is central to understanding the war on Iraq even though Iraq was in no way involved in it. This attack exposed a terrible threat to the US, originating in the Middle East and Muslim world that had to be countered. At the same time, hard-liners in the Bush administration who had advocated an attack on Iraq even before 9/11 saw it as an opportunity to mobilize support for a war they thought would be decisive in transforming the Middle East to suit US interests (Orfy, 2010). The first hurdle the Bush administration had to clear was to legitimize war on a state that did not threaten the US. The issue of WMDs was hit upon as a way to turn the 'war on terrorism' against Iraq. To do so, Bush had to claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida and was actively developing weapons of mass destruction which he might turn over to terrorists or use on their behalf, and hence that Iraq represented an imminent threat to the US. These claims have not only been discredited but, additionally, there is strong evidence that the war party in Washington deliberated exaggerated unreliable claims and knew Iraq was no threat to the US. At any rate, the threat was never that WMDs would be used against the US but that they could constrain US freedom of action in the Middle East or threaten Israel (Walt, 2001). To understand the real motives behind the war and why Bush saw an attack on Iraq as the solution to US problems, we need to shift the focus from security threats to the US, toward threats to its strategic situation in the Middle East and its hegemony over the oil market.

First, US oil vulnerability was on the rise. US import dependence was rising in an ever-tighter oil market with global production seemingly peaking, hence shifting the balance of power to oil producers (Hinnebusch, 2011). These conditions could make the US and the world capitalist economy vulnerable to an oil shock historically fatal for US presidents. Iraq was a solution to these potential threats for it had the world's second largest oil reserves and very low production costs. However, as long as Saddam was in power, its oil could not be used for US benefit; the sanctions the US believed essential to contain Saddam meant most Iraqi oil remained off the market and if Saddam were to find some way to overcome them and get out of isolation, the risk increased that he would try to use Iraq's oil for political advantage, as he had tried to do before, specifically by seeking to make access to oil contingent on US policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Dunn, 2003). The extra ingredient is the special interests of the ruling coalition because a different administration would arguably not have gone to war with Iraq and would have pursued other less risky ways of addressing US dilemmas-such as re-starting the peace process and adjusting dual containment; after all, Iraq posed no threat to the US and war with it was on nobody's agenda until the Bush administration put it there.

Key Takeaways

The US invasion of Iraq offers some valuable lessons for regional and external powers about the perils of intervention. To begin with, the Iraq war is a test case of the doctrine of "preventive war" and of the neo-conservative belief that overwhelming military superiority can be translated into unchallenged hegemony in the Middle East (Danchev & MacMillan, 2005). However, this wasn't the case as the event unfolded. First of all, intelligence failures and its manipulation for political ends, undermined the credibility of the doctrine of preemption as David Kay, Bush's weapons inspector in Iraq, admitted that "If you cannot rely on good, accurate intelligence that is credible to the American people and others abroad, you can't have a policy of preemption" (Leffler, 2005). In addition, the war cost the US financially as military expenditure turned the \$127 billion budget surplus he inherited in 2001 into a \$374 billion deficit in 2003. Moreover, US troops killed reached 3,000 in 2006 and total casualties (including injured) had topped 17,000 by 2005 (But, 2019). The military was indeed badly over-stretched.

Secondly, the longer-term costs of the war for US hegemony appear to be significant. Others states perceived a hegemon that was not constrained by international institutions or the opinions of allies to be a threat to-rather than a guarantor of-global stability. Arguably, Bush had eroded the alliance system upon which America's hegemonic leadership rested (Ikenberry, & Nexon, 2019). Europe's main security fear was no longer, as in the Cold War, that Washington would abandon it but that it would destabilize the Middle East and stir up Western-Islamic tensions. Bush weakened what was, after 9/11, a cordial relationship with Russia, based partly on a perception of a shared interest in countering the Islamist threat. Another major cost of the war has been the loss of respect suffered by Washington in global public opinion. Arthur Schlesinger wrote that "the global wave of sympathy that engulfed the US after 9/11 has given way to a global wave of hatred of American arrogance and militarism" (Chomsky, 2004). The proportion of people around the world who had a favourable view of the US dropped precipitously as a result of the war. In a Times Magazine poll just before the war, 84% of Europeans identified the US as the main threat to world peace (Hinnebusch, 2007).

Thirdly, the selfish behavior associated with realism, is considered the primary approach in the US policy. This might be seen as supporting the notion that there is a mutual interest between US politicians and those who have economic interests. There are indications that they support each other to achieve their own interests, for instance "in late October 2003, a report by the Centre for Public Integrity (CPI) said that many of the US firms which won Iraqi reconstruction contracts were major donors to George W. Bush's political campaigns, especially the year 2000 campaign (Dodge, 2013). On one hand, the only American owners of oil interests and the owners of the US weapons factories, who benefit from the 2003 Iraq war, are the elite wealthy oil people who financed Bush's election campaigns twice (Le Billon & El Khatib, 2004). Finally, this war should never have been embarked upon until the alternatives had been exhausted. In other words, when the means of diplomacy get exhausted, the voices of war rise. On this account, any action in war is impermissible without a legitimate reason. Thus, it should have taken a war resolution

through the international consensus via the UN Security Council, respecting its international prestige. Moreover, the war created new sectarian divides; Iran has been empowered by the demise of its old rival Saddam Hussein; new 'pivotal' states like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have emerged; the new US foreign policy has had to review their policy prescriptions and assumptions of regional predominance (Fawcett, 2013).

Conclusion

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the culmination of a long series of events and the product of many complex, different, and yet interrelated factors. In the first instance, it was a part of the counterattack the US embarked on against terrorism in the wake of the 9/11 atrocities. Saddam Hussein's links to terrorist organizations in the past qualified Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism and, therefore, a target under the criteria which George W. Bush set out when he announced the war on terror. As Afghanistan was invaded, the Taliban regime overthrown, and the remnants of al-Qaeda scattered, Iraq represented the next logical step in the War on Terror (Fisher, 2003). Although no direct links were ever found between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, despite feverish attempts to do so by Neo-conservatives in the Bush administration, there was irrefutable proof of links to other terrorist networks which adhered to a similar ideology. The issue of Iraq's possession of WMD, which had dragged on since the first Gulf War all the way through the 1990s, took on new significance in the post 9/11 security environment. Rather than being a problem of merely containing Saddam Hussein, Iraq's WMD manufacturing capability now more than ever represented an existential threat to the US, as the US claimed it led the invasion in order to remove this manufacturing base so it could not be used to arm terrorist groups, particularly al-Qaeda. However, this article established that the unofficial reasons why the US led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were the need to make an example and strike a massive blow demonstrating America's unmatched military power. Findings from the article also showed that the US led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 for reasons ranging from relatively practical considerations stemming from 9/11, including disrupting terrorist organizations and their potential arming with WMD by Saddam Hussein, to the far reaching strategic masterstrokes of an act of deterrence, controlling the energy reserves of that country and transforming the entire Middle East.

Furthermore, within the context of all justifications for a just cause presented by the US proven false, this article presented moral arguments over the use of force in Iraq from pre-emption to last resort to assess whether the US was left with no other option but to invade. While it is hard to establish a prudential test for last resort, in theory it suggests the exhaustion of all reasonable options prior to launching a military intervention. In the case of Iraq, the options would have been diplomatic negotiations, extended sanctions and further UN inspections. Therefore, this article admits that the US policy in pre-invasion Iraq was definitely not a positive one. Hussein's dictatorship coupled with US extremism in punishing a country for not submitting to US imperialism thus became the ideal ground of torture for a population that was already weary from internal turmoil and divisions. The subsequent occupation went wrong partly due to the US policies which created or

exacerbated tensions within Iraq leading to civil war, and also because of the consequence of the US creating hostile relations with the international community who were then reluctant to help. Finally, the impact of the war on Iraq is that it has led to a revert back to realism, which advocates that in international politics, the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must.

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