

One War, Many Reasons: The US Invasion of Iraq

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Iraq has been the focus of the international community and has been featured prominently in the media in recent times, as the radical Islamist group known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has dramatically increased its power and influence in the region in the latter half of 2014. The political turmoil and drastically deteriorated security environment, which characterises modern day Iraq, can be traced back to the United States (US) invasion of that country and ISIS, which has recently emerged in Iraq and Syria, in the insurgency against the resultant US occupation, back then in the form of al-Qaeda in Iraq. But why did the US invade and occupy Iraq in the first place? To this day, there is a divisive debate about what the Bush administration's motives were, with the most likely explanation being a combination of all of the reasons offered. What must also be considered is that the events leading up to the 2003 invasion only go half way to explain why the US chose to launch this campaign, and in order to understand the complex and multidimensional factors contributing to the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq, one must go back further and examine pre 9/11 US policy. Likewise, the official and publically stated reasons for military action only go some way to explain the invasion, and one must look at the unofficial factors and goals which were determinants of equal importance.

The immediate considerations behind the invasion of Iraq were characterized by concerns brought to the forefront by the events of September 11th 2001, namely global terrorism, and more importantly, the weapons at its disposal in a new era of transnational asymmetrical war waged by non-state actors. As President George W. Bush made it clear in his State of the Union on January 29th 2002, in meeting this challenge, the US would not differentiate between terrorist groups and nations which harbour or arm them (Bush, 2002). This policy led to the invasion of Afghanistan, motivated by the need to remove al-Qaeda's safe haven and training ground.

Iraq did not specifically harbour al-Qaeda, but it had provided training camps and other support to terrorist groups fighting the government of Turkey and Iran, as well as hard-line Palestinian groups. In fact, "the question of Iraq's link to terrorism grew more urgent with Saddam's suspected determination to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which Bush administration officials feared he might share with terrorists who could launch devastating attacks against the United States" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005). Nonetheless, the official reason that the US cited for launching the invasion was exemplified by Colin Powell's statement to the United Nations on February 5th 2003 (Washington Post, 2005).

However, the unofficial reasons why the US led the Invasion of Iraq in 2003 are equally important. The main unofficial consideration was that removing Saddam Hussein would be a demonstration of US military might against a visible enemy, a demonstration which hawkish elements within the Bush administration and the military establishment considered necessary to deter others and to dispel any appearance of weakness following 9/11 (Karon, 2011). This consideration is motivated by Realism, and, according to Daniel Lieberfeld's explanatory perspectives on the Iraq Invasion, was meant to "maintain unipolarity, maintain hegemony and avoid post-9/11 decline by demonstrating U.S. willingness to use force" (Lieberfeld, 2005).

The fact that Iraq has the world's second largest reserves of oil can also not be overlooked. Although major critics of the war such as the political scholars Paul Pillar, Stephen Walt, and John Mearsheimer generally disagree that the war was about oil, Pillar did state that "Iraq's oil resources are part of what makes it an important and influential state in the Middle East, and thus one where it was hoped that change would serve as a catalyst for change elsewhere in

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the region” (Pillar, 2008). The Bush administration hoped that removing Saddam Hussein would result in a domino effect, where all regimes in the greater Middle East hostile to the US and its interests in the region would be intimidated into cooperation, or toppled by their populations following the example the US had set freeing the Iraqi people (Gauss III, 2009).

Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was considered the perfect country to be made an example of as animosity between the US and Saddam Hussein went back many decades, and removing him was considered unfinished business by many senior Neo-conservatives in the Bush administration such as Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney (Manne, 2004). Thus, this essay aims to examine both the immediate and official reasons why the US led the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the unofficial goals of this campaign, as well as other contributing considerations which had been present long before 9/11.

Iraq as a State Sponsor of Terrorism

The al-Qaeda attacks on New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania graphically brought home the dangers of international terrorism to the United States. To combat this threat, the US embarked on the global War on Terror, reassigning terrorism from a law enforcement issue to a military issue warranting aggressive counterattack. This was due to the realisation that:

Non-state and clandestinely state sponsored groups now [had] the ability and willingness to employ means of mass destruction [which] has dictated the recognition that States no longer [had] a monopoly on war. Therefore, it [had] become appropriate to use war powers against foreign terrorist organizations (Terwilliger, 2005).

Although al-Qaeda was the prime target, any organisation deemed to be a terrorist organisation would also be targeted. The term “War on Terror” originated from President George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union, in which he made clear that the US would not only combat terrorist organisations aggressively, but also any country deemed to be training, equipping or supporting them (Bush, 2002). In his words, “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, aiming to threaten the peace of the world” (Bush, 2002). The speech went on to say that “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror” (Bush, 2002), a statement which clearly identifies Iraq as a sponsor of terrorism, and therefore a prime target and central front in the War on Terror.

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, otherwise known as the 9/11 Commission, which was set up in the wake of the September 11th 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 say:

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.

Saddam used foreign terrorist groups as an instrument of foreign policy. Groups hosted by Saddam were denied protection if he wanted to improve relations with a neighbouring country and encouraged to attack those Saddam wanted to pressure. If they refused Saddam’s “requests,” they were exiled from Iraq (Yaphe, 2003).

Although these statements were made after the invasion of Iraq had begun on March 19, and, therefore, cannot be considered to have contributed to the Bush administration’s decision to launch it, they do, nonetheless, reveal one camp of opinion within the US intelligence community. “Before joining the INSS in 1995, Dr. Yaphe served for 20 years as a senior analyst on Near East Persian Gulf issues in the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA” (Saudi-US Relations Information Service, date unknown).

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However, there have also been a multitude of reports which state that there were no verified links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, and that he saw the group as a threat, not as an ally (Katzman, 2004). There was a desire by some elements within the Bush administration to link Saddam Hussein's Iraq to al-Qaeda no matter what, in order to justify the invasion they had already decided on (Gellmann, 2004). Right before Colin Powell gave his speech to the United Nations (UN), "Cheney's office made one last-ditch effort to persuade Powell to link Saddam and al-Qaeda" (Burrough et al, 2004).

Whether or not Saddam Hussein had links to al-Qaeda, he did have links to other terrorist groups which he tolerated on Iraqi soil and even trained, equipped, and supported. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, they are:

Primarily groups that could hurt Saddam's regional foes. Saddam has aided the Iranian dissident group Mujahadeen-e-Khalq and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (known by its Turkish initials, PKK), a separatist group fighting the Turkish government. Moreover, Iraq has hosted several Palestinian splinter groups that oppose peace with Israel, including the mercenary Abu Nidal Organization, whose leader, Abu Nidal, was found dead in Baghdad in August 2002. Iraq has also supported the Islamist Hamas movement and reportedly channelled money to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).

Israel, a staunch US ally also fighting terrorism, which in the view of many in the Bush administration was being sponsored and supported by Saddam Hussein, was no doubt also a consideration (Weber, 2008). In this newly militarised anti-terrorism campaign which the US was embarking on in response to 9/11, Iraq was simply too tempting a target for striking the next blow in the War on Terror after the unsatisfying victory in Afghanistan (Gainsville Sun, 2002). Its past links to terrorist organisations alone sufficed, but it was also suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction and the ability to manufacture them.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

In his 2002 State of the Union which laid out US strategy, President Bush stated:

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 (Bush, 2002).

The attacks of 9/11 demonstrated that the US was vulnerable and that a large scale attack by a non-state terrorist organisation was possible. It also demonstrated that these organisations had the will to cause as much death and destruction as possible and did not have any scruples about inflicting casualties on civilians or were prepared to follow rules of war accepted by most nation states to some degree or other. It, therefore, followed that groups such as these would try to acquire weapons as destructive as possible, which in the modern world was no longer as difficult or unthinkable as it once was. 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 organisations, 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.

"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" (Wright and Hopper, 2005). 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. Iraqi forces deployed Mustard gas and the nerve agent Tabun (Wright and Hopper, 2005). In 1988, Saddam Hussein ordered a chemical attack on the town of Halabja during his campaign to put down a Kurdish rebellion

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(Wright and Hopper, 2005). 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). Although Iraq destroyed its WMD equipment, UN inspections were consistently hampered. On October 11th 1991, the UNSC passed resolution 715 stating that Iraq must “accept unconditionally the inspectors and all other personnel designated by the Special Commission” (Wright and Hopper, 2005).

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 August 8th 1995, “Hussein Kamel, the former director of Iraq’s Military Industrialization Corporation, responsible for all WMD programmes, defected to Jordan. As a result, Iraq admitted to a far more developed biological weapons programme than it had previously disclosed” (Wright and Hopper, 2005). In June 1997, in another effort to end Iraq’s interference with UN inspections, the UNSC passed resolution 1115, and by the end of the year, the diplomatic stalemate forced the UN to withdraw most of its personnel from the country (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 (Wright and Hopper, 2005). 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. During this time, the US was gearing up for war, as it viewed, officially at least, the threat that Iraq’s weapons programme posed as unacceptable in the post 9/11 world.

Another possible consideration was now that the US had proved that it had the will to go to war by invading Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries that were a part of the “Axis of Evil,” they would normally not associate with as an insurance policy in case the US invaded (Soderblom, 2004). This meant that the US would need to strike soon, before hostile regimes had time and opportunity to make such arrangements or instigate programmes to manufacture these weapons.

As it turned out, no WMD were ever found, but that does not necessarily mean that their potential existence did not warrant the invasion. Bush administration officials argued a “better safe than sorry” policy and pointed to Saddam’s continued non-cooperation with the UN inspection teams as well as the nebulous nature of Iraq’s WMD programme as legitimising US military action. Detractors of this stance argue that even if the Bush administration did not outright lie about Iraq’s WMD programme, it at the very least massively inflated its dimensions, sophistication, and threat level in order to justify the war. The most outspoken critics of the Bush administration claimed that the Iraq War was about oil, citing administration officials’ statements to that effect (Wright, 2003). According to Noam Chomsky, the deals taking shape between Iraq’s Oil Ministry and Western oil companies also:

Raises critical questions about the nature of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq — questions that should certainly be addressed by presidential candidates and seriously discussed in the United States, and of course in occupied Iraq, where it appears that the population has little if any role in determining the future of their country (Chomsky, 2008).

Although it is unlikely that oil was not also a consideration, there is no denying that the issue of weapons of mass destruction was central to the US led invasion of Iraq.

A Visible Enemy

Another reason why the US led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was that it presented a visible enemy. The US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 had led to the rapid collapse of the Taliban regime and the remainder of its fighters along with al-Qaeda had retreated into the tribal areas bordering Pakistan. A lot of the fighting had been done by the

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Northern Alliance, an indigenous anti-Taliban militia in Afghanistan, backed by US airstrikes. US Special Forces and then US ground forces did enter Afghanistan and fought the Taliban and al-Qaeda, notably during Operation Anaconda in March 2002 (Naylor, 2006), but it was not the awe inspiring hammer blow which the US wanted to demonstrate its power. “Instead, Pentagon planners began shifting military and intelligence resources away from Afghanistan in the direction of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, which was increasingly mentioned as a chief U.S. threat in the war on terror” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2002). Iraq presented a much better arena to show the world the extent of the US’ military supremacy. Iraq also possessed a proper traditional army, which could be defeated more conventionally bringing the full spectrum of US dominance to bear in a campaign of “Shock and Awe” (CNN, 2003). This campaign was intended to show that:

The military posture and capability of the United States of America are, today, dominant. Simply put, there is no external adversary in the world that can successfully challenge the extraordinary power of the American military in either regional conflict or in “conventional” war as we know it once the United States makes the commitment to take whatever action may be needed (Ullmann et al, 1996).

For the US, the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan showed it would live up to its policy brought into being by President Bush’s State of the Union, but it was not an ample example of the punishment that rogue states which were a part of the Axis of Evil could expect to receive. Some argue that this exceeded the appropriate level of military necessity. According to Henry Michaels, “purely military considerations cannot explain such savagery. Bush’s war plans are driven by political aims—to terrorize and demoralize the Iraqi people and the Arab masses and send a message of violence and intimidation to the entire world” (Michaels, 2003). In general, however, it is accepted that the US army has largely kept to the principles of distinction and proportionality in Iraq (Powers, date unknown), with some notable exceptions such as the Abu Ghraib incident and the Haditha killings.

Another reason why Iraq was chosen for this demonstration was that Saddam Hussein was known internationally as a brutal dictator and, therefore, removing him would most likely not meet with as much international resistance than if the US invaded a less unsavoury regime in the region. This, combined with Iraq’s history of flaunting UN resolutions regarding WMD, and their use in both war against Iran and repression of rebellion at home, added to making it an appropriate target and next front in the War on Terror.

There was also a history of conflict between Iraq and the US. The US led the first invasion of Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War, which was backed by the UN (Lewis, 1991). This came about when Iraq invaded Kuwait and refused to pull out despite UN resolution 678, which authorized all member states “to use all necessary means” to “bring Iraq into compliance with previous Security Council resolutions if it did not do so by 15 January 1991” (Council on Foreign Relations, 1990). Operation Desert Fox was another example of US action against Iraq, approved by the UN and overall international opinion. There were, therefore, many reasons why the US assumed it would be acceptable to invade Iraq now that WMD were on the top of the global agenda, which made the issue of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq more relevant than ever.

There was also the issue of a desire by senior US policymakers in government and senior officers within the military establishment to “finish off” Saddam Hussein’s regime once and for all, and many considered the war in Iraq as unfinished business left over from the first Gulf War (Gompert et al, 2014). Senior officials in the Bush administration had, in fact, lobbied the government to invade Iraq before the 9/11 attacks ever took place (Lind, 2003). These officials were now in a position to influence policy and saw the War on Terror as the opportunity to marry the new US pre-emptive war policy with their agenda of toppling Saddam which they had been pushing on US administrations for years. Among them were the Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, the Vice President Dick Cheney, and the Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. These officials were members of an organisation called the Project for the New American Century, which had lobbied government for years to invade Iraq, and even went so far as to send an open letter to former President Bill Clinton in 1998 urging him to do so (Palermo, 2011).

There is also the issue that President George W. Bush was the son of President Bush senior who had invaded Iraq in the first Gulf War, and perhaps a quasi patrimonial desire to finish what his father had started was one of many factors which combined to motivate him act (Jassat, 2002). His own statement “after all, this is the guy who tried to

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kill my dad" (Bush, 2002, cited by King, 2002) suggest a personal motive, which, combined with a sense of national duty to protect the US and punish those responsible for 9/11, and pressure from the more hawkish elements within the US military establishment, perhaps made him almost believe that this was destiny. Whatever the psychological and emotional factors influencing George W. Bush were, which all human beings are subject to no matter how high their office, a large part of the US establishment sought a visible enemy to make an example of to deter others, hoping to start a domino effect in the Middle East which would see one hostile regime after another fall, thereby initiating a self fulfilling victory in the War on Terror.

The Domino Effect

The invasion of Iraq and its intended effects cannot be simply seen by themselves, but must be understood in the greater context. The US intended the invasion to not only topple Saddam Hussein and remove the threat of WMD production and diffusion, but also to bring democracy to a country in the centre of a region almost completely devoid of it. In his State of the Union, President Bush made it clear that he intended to bring democracy to the Middle East. His doctrine at its core was that people who are free and prosperous do not fly airplanes into skyscrapers. In his speech, he made his point that "all fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated and live free from poverty and violence. No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, or aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police" (Bush, 2002). His policy in Iraq, derived from Wilsonianism (Bhansali, date unknown) and Manifest Destiny (Jones, 2014) was:

Not merely to expunge the totalitarians there, but to ensure that they never return by reconstructing their societies along democratic lines. Authoritarianism (at least in the Middle East) is no longer acceptable. The U.S. now proposes to liberate these nations from the captivity of their own unhappy traditions (Kesler, 2005).

Once Iraq was a flourishing democracy prosperous from massive oil revenues which would pay for reconstruction, it would become an example which other states, or at least their populations, would emulate. Hostile regimes in the region would find it harder and harder to paint the US in a negative light and to control and oppress their citizens. One regime after another would be toppled, supplanted by friendly governments representing grateful populations which would end in a stable, peaceful, and secure Middle East, constituting victory in the war on terror, safeguarding the United States, improving Israel's security, and ensuring uninterrupted global access to oil reserves.

According to The Telegraph's Toby Harnden, "the creation of a democratic regime in Iraq 'could fundamentally reshape' the Middle East and make it easier to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, said yesterday [6 February 2003]" (Harnden, 2003). Powell stated, "I think there is also the possibility that success could fundamentally reshape that region in a powerful, positive way that will enhance US interests, especially if in the aftermath of such a conflict, we are also able to achieve progress on the Middle East peace" (Powel, 2003, cited by Harnden, 2003). The US had in the past invaded, occupied and transformed totalitarian regimes into democracies, notably Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, now firm allies. These were highly industrialised societies, however, in nations utterly destroyed in ruinous wars which had lasted years and then occupied for the better part of half a century. Whether this feat could be repeated in Iraq was a very open question. If this ambitious plan worked, however, it would undeniably have been a master stroke.

There were democratic movements in other authoritarian countries in the region, such as Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran was also a part of the Axis of Evil, but would be a much greater task to invade and defeat militarily (Walt, 2011). If the regime could be toppled from within, by a population wishing to enjoy the same freedoms the people of Iraq now enjoyed after Operation Iraqi Freedom, then the US could claim victory in three wars by fighting only two. Syria, which was seen as a proxy of Iran, could also succumb to pro democracy forces, and a democratic Lebanon, no longer run by the Muslim paramilitary group Hezbollah, would greatly increase Israel's security.

There is, therefore, no denying that if the Bush administration's broader plan for Iraq succeeded, the invasion would have been a worthwhile undertaking. Although the US has now withdrawn from Iraq, it could be argued that the events known as the "Arab Spring" (Blight et al, 2012), which refers to democratic uprisings across the Arab world in 2011, are a spin off from the US campaigns to bring democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq. Whether or not one shares

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that view, it is clear that the Bush administration had such an effect in mind as one of the possible positive effects when it invaded Iraq in 2003.

This desire to spread democracy was a part of US policy for centuries and was one of the stated goals of President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he decided to supply Britain against Nazi Germany. This policy eventually led to US involvement in World War Two and the defeat, occupation, and transformation of Germany from a dictatorship into a democracy. One could argue, therefore, that President Bush was applying a strategy which was ingrained in US policy and had worked for it in the past. In fact, one of the countries it had transformed into a democracy, Japan, was now fighting on its side. Japanese "Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his cabinet voted on December 9 to deploy Japan's ground, air, and maritime self-defence forces (SDF) to participate in the US-led occupation of Iraq" (Conachy, 2003).

The ambitious goal of transforming the Middle East was not the main stated goal of the US invasion, but it was no doubt one of the long term objectives of it. Rather than just fighting the symptom of terrorism and WMD proliferation, the US sought to address the root causes of this problem in its grand strategy. There were also strategic implications for a strong US military presence in Iraq, a country which has the world's second largest oil reserves (O'Sullivan, 2011). These implications include: deterring Iran from interfering with its neighbours, being close to the Straits of Hormuz, ensuring this vital oil corridor remains open, keeping an eye on Pakistan, and having a springboard for other possible invasions, notably Iran which the US accused of seeking to illicitly develop a nuclear weapon (Goldberg, 2012). This springboard that an occupied Iraq would present would enable the US to take military action to stop Iran from achieving nuclear weapon status, something Israel says it will not tolerate (Hirschfeld, 2012).

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 organisations 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 in his 2002 State of the Union. Once 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 (Rotella, 2002). 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, and it led the invasion in order to remove this manufacturing base so it could not be used to arm terrorist groups, particularly al-Qaeda.

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. Victory in Afghanistan was always a foregone conclusion, as it would not have taken any organised full spectrum military long to defeat the poorly equipped Taliban. Hawkish elements within the Bush administration and the military establishment sought to intimidate and deter any other nation from harbouring terrorists by waging a campaign of rapid dominance, thereby sending the clear signal that any country deemed a threat could be next, and could not hope to defend itself against the might of the US army (Tisdall, 2003).

There was also the belief, or hope, that invading Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein might set in motion a domino effect, where other hostile regimes in the Middle East would be forced to acquiesce to the US by their populations demanding the same democratic freedoms the liberated people of Iraq now enjoyed. Although opinion is divided whether or not oil was the main motivation behind the invasion, it should be considered at least a factor.

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It could be said that the US led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 for reasons ranging from relatively small practical considerations stemming from 9/11, namely disrupting terrorist organisations 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 (Toensing, 2007).

Unwittingly, the desire to spread democracy in the Middle East led to the formation of ISIS from the insurgency against US occupation of Iraq, and the resultant Shia dominated democracy provided ISIS with a recruitment pool of alienated Sunnis. Furthermore, the heavy weaponry abandoned by the fleeing Iraqi army, much of which was provided to it by the US, has transformed ISIS into a pseudo army, and is being used to consolidate as well as increase its gains. Finally, the democratic revolution and resultant civil war in Syria to overthrow Basher al-Assad has established ISIS as the main rebel group and has led to the radicalisation of the once moderate opposition in that conflict.

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