The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope

https://www.e-ir.info/2010/06/10/the-2003-invasion-of-iraq-under-the-microscope/

DAVID SYKES, JUN 10 2010

To find out more about E-IR essay awards, click here.

"What were the aims of the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq? Did the invasion and subsequent occupation meet these aims?"

Seven years ago on the 19th of March, the United States began military strikes on Iraq with four satellite guided 2,000 pound 'bunker buster' bombs being dropped along with nearly forty Tomahawk cruise missiles being launched.[1] Though it was not formally declared until the next day, this was the beginning of the US-led Iraq War. This essay will analyse the primary aims and objectives that the US tried to achieve in its invasion and will evaluate the degree of success that America had in carrying out its plans. The essay will begin with the arguments behind the invasion on the grounds of security, including direct security of the region through the need to disarm Saddam Hussein's government of its alleged weapons of mass-destruction, and the intention to promote stability in the region through the faith in the ability of democracy to create peace and the conditions for development and belief that democracy would spread across borders. The humanitarian goals will then be analysed as although the war successfully removed a tyrannical mass-murderer from power, new humanitarian problems have emerged. The plan for the security of American oil resources will be analysed. As each of these objectives and aims are discussed, the essay will evaluate their successes and failures, which will then be summarised and put together in order to determine in which ways America was successful in Iraq, and in what ways the US-led coalition failed to meet its targets as well as the possibility of their aims being met in the future.

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope

Written by David Sykes

Weapons of mass-destruction, or WMDs were one of the main arguments behind the invasion. It was argued by the US and the British governments that Iraq was in possession of weapons that were a serious threat to the security of western nations and the security of the nations in the region. They argued that intervention and regime change was necessary to forcibly disarm a nation that was not complying with the demands and requirements of the international community and which they argued was a global danger.[2] On this understanding then, one of the primary aims of the invasion of Iraq was to increase the security of the US and the rest of the world by removing a regime that posed a threat through contempt for the international community, a historical record of hostility to its neighbours, and the possession of weapons capable of massive destructive force.

'We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction; he's determined to make more. Given Saddam Hussein's history of aggression… given what we know of his terrorist associations and given his determination to exact revenge on those who oppose him, should we take the risk that he will not some day use these weapons at a time and the place and in the manner of his choosing at a time when the world is in a much weaker position to respond? The United States will not and cannot run that risk to the American people. Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11 world.' **[3]**

The war was tied in to the wider War on Terror which planned pre-emptive military action against states believed to be developing WMDs and sponsoring terrorist organisations. It was argued that Saddam Hussein's regime created the conditions that aided the growth of terrorists, and that Iraq was itself a rogue nation. It was also insinuated a number of times that Iraq was partly implicated with the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, and had links with al Qaeda, despite this being unproven and illogical, as Hussein and Al-Qaeda were of opposite political ideologies and had long been enemies.[4] [5]

This purpose for the war and the aim for securing the US against Iraqi attack is perhaps the most easy to refute. Hussein was in no position to pose any serious threat to the United States; there were no WMDs in Iraq, and Saddam Hussein's regime had nothing to do with the Al Qaeda terrorist network[6]. In actuality, the invasion may have actually increased the danger faced by America as it has increased the anti-American sentiment and radical Islamist movements in Iraq and the Middle-East as the invasions could be viewed as a new form of imperialism and the number of civilian deaths and the grotesque treatment of prisoners in cases such as Abu Graib have severely damaged American support. The war has also created an unstable, dangerous and turbulent Iraq and, as will be explained later, the war has shifted the middle-eastern balance of power and has destabilised the entire region.[7]

Another element of the US' plan to protect itself was based on the belief that undemocratic and dictatorial regimes create conditions that enable the growth of terrorist groups, are prone to war, and create tension and conflict internationally. Liberal democracy, they argued, is a much more peaceful form of government. The Neo-conservatives that had a large influence over the Bush Administration's foreign policy argue that democracies rarely, if ever, fight one another or experience civil war or internal conflict.[8] This democratic peace exists because, according to liberals and neo-conservatives, because the decision to go to war is made by a government that is directly accountable to the people, and it is the people who feel the consequences of warfare. Those who live under democratic governments are risk averse and cost sensitive and so are reluctant to agree to or support the decision to go to war. Another cause of the peacefulness of democracies that has an impact on wider security is that a democratic electoral system can foster ethnic moderation, keeping extremists isolated and out of power, while ensuring that communities coexists peacefully.[9] Based on this logic the American and British policy makers believed that by bringing democracy to Iraq, the regional security and their own security will be improved, the society would cease supporting terrorists (which it wasn't doing), and would end its hostility towards Israel.[10] However, this theory has come under considerable criticism from academics from other schools of thought, and other liberals, who point out that democracies can be just as violent as other governments; for example, the only state that has deployed a nuclear bomb against another state was a democracy, and the Iraq War itself was initiated by democratic states.[11]

The alternative liberal view to this argues that instead of democracies being simply more peaceful to all states, liberal democracies are more peaceful to other liberal democratic states because they form complex interconnections

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope
Written by David Sykes

between one another that makes the possibility of war unthinkable as it would be too damaging to the societies and individuals who grow to transcend the boundaries of the nation state.[12] But this view raises a number of problems for the plan to democratise Iraq would mean the creation of a democratic nation in a region of mostly undemocratic states, which would be dangerous because, as Doyle acknowledges, while it has been very successful in creating peace among liberal states, 'liberalism has been equally striking as a failure in guiding foreign policy outside the liberal world' as the same characteristics 'that promote peace among liberal societies can exacerbate conflicts between liberal and non-liberal societies'.[13]

Another criticism of the aim of imposing liberal democracy is the argument that democracy must develop from below, rather than being imposed on one nation by another. Indeed, it has been argued that the Western democratic campaign in the middle-east is a form of imperial intervention[14]. Some realists have argued that the process of democratisation is dangerous as the transition to democracy creates instability and conflict, as can be seen by the ongoing insurgency and conflict in Iraq.[15]

The US had hoped that once democracy had been established in Iraq it 'would open the way to a far more stable and peaceful region'.[16] Those who supported the imposition of democracy on the nation argued that a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Iraq would cause a reduction in interstate antagonism and would serve as a 'beacon' for liberal democracy in the middle-east that would inspire and pressure nearby states into liberalising, bringing further democratisation of the region.[17] However, this belief has been criticised for being much like the domino theory on the spread of international communism in the Cold War and the objective has faced, and is argued to face, many challenges.[18] Alina Romanowski, a senior US government civilian official in the Middle East argues that 'Iraq presents as unpromising a breeding ground for democracy as any in the world', and many argue that Iraqi society is too fractured and lacks the preconditions necessary for democracy to be established. These problems include a lack of cohesive unifying identity, a risk of Iranian and Turkish meddling, a poorly organised political leadership, and the lack of a history of democracy.[19] But despite the challenges and the anti-democratic terrorist attacks, democracy has been established, though the ability of this to continue to function and to thrive is yet to be seen. One of the main challenges to the new democracy is insecurity, but with the building up of a new Iraqi military and police force, and the assistance of other nations, democracy in Iraq might be feasible.[20]

But will this democracy and peace be able to spread to other nations in the region and what are the possibilities of a democratic Iraq helping to create regional peace? Though theorists such as Huntington, Starr and Lindborg argued that democracy can spill over borders and Cederman and Gleditsch concluded that the more democracies there are in a region, the more likely undemocratic states in the region will democratise, others disagree.[21] Enterline & Greig argue that it is possible for the democratisation of Iraq to enable peace to spread to nearby nations provided that the democracy is a beacon that 'burns brightly', reflecting strong democratic institutions so as to reduce conflict with neighbours. However, they argue that should Iraq become a 'dim democratic beacon' it would have the opposite consequences as it would 'increase their own conflict propensity, as well as the war-proneness of neighbouring states' which would undermine the peace and prosperity of neighbouring nations.[22] Having gathered statistical data on past externally imposed democracies they argue that even if Iraq became a bright beacon, democracy would be unlikely to spread, and they also argue that it is unlikely for Iraq to become a bright beacon due to the ethnic and religious conflicts tension in Iraq, the near absence of a democratic tradition, the impact of US occupation and the potential hostility of Iraq's neighbours. They also argue that should Iraq become a dim beacon, it would undermine, rather than enhance regional democratisation.[23]

However, the true results of the democratisation process are yet to be seen as though there have been setbacks and challenges, Iraq has had successful democratic elections since the invasion, but time may be the only test of whether democracy will hold in Iraq and whether regional democratisation and peace will follow.

But the democratisation of Iraq was not solely for strategic and security purposes. The humanitarian motives for toppling an oppressive and tyrannical dictatorship from power and replacing it with a liberal democratic government are clear; Saddam Hussein was terrible man who murdered thousands of his own people and ruled with oppression and force[24]. In this respect, removing the dictator from power the war was clearly a humanitarian victory. However the invasion and subsequent occupation as well as the insurgency and internal conflict have claimed the lives of

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope
Written by David Sykes

between 95,700 and 104,400 civilians.[25] Professor Gareth Stansfield argues that 'things are far worse as a result of the war… Under Saddam, law and order was not an issue. There was no sectarian violence; no gross levels of violence. Post 2003, it has become a very serious problem.'[26] There has also been a reduction in living standards as electricity has been limited, sanitation is poor, drinking water has been contaminated or cut off, and healthcare has suffered as a consequence of the sanctions place on the country prior to the invasion as well as the invasion and removal of the government and breakdown of infrastructure.

The removal of the oppressive regime has also not necessarily translated to an improvement of civil rights. Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt point out how despite it having been one of the aims of the occupying forces to improve the civil rights of the oppressed under Saddam's regime, women face serious setbacks to their liberty and human and civil rights. The Bush administration refused to back the establishment of quotas on the employment of female workers and the allowance of female politicians, which has been heavily criticised. Women have made moves into politics and have proved effective as pressure groups and campaigners (female support proved decisive in the opposition to Resolution 137 in 2004, which would have introduced a more conservative interpretation of Sharia law) but female employment has declined since the invasion as concerns for their security have forced them to avoid work and women have faced disproportionate job loss as a result of privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Perhaps the biggest shock is that the removal of the Hussein regime has led to widespread oppression of women, who are being increasingly harassed and assaulted by Islamist militias that roam the streets and kidnapped and sexually assaulted by criminal gangs, who sometime kidnap Iraqi women for trafficking. In the absence of the old secular regime, the increasingly conservative Islamist gender ideologues further impinge on women's daily lives, which many reports emerging in Basra of women being forced to wear headscarves and have had to restrict their movements for fear of harassment. The Women's Rights Association claims that there have been many cases of women being physically attacked and killed for not wearing headscarves. The violence caused by the war and the occupation has also led to women and girls missing school and university for weeks or even months out of fear.[27]

It is widely argued that one of the primary reasons for the Iraq War was for the procurement of the second largest oil reserves in the world. Indeed, this objective was achieved almost immediately when the US secured a UN resolution granting the US and UK occupying authority control over the expenditure of Iraqi oil revenues. There are many arguments that this was for commercial gain in order to support the US economy and oil lobbyists, however Alkadiri and Mohamedi argue that Iraqi oil has far more strategic value for the US as it would hoped it would secure Western resources, reduce dependency on the undemocratic oil producing nations, and would undermine, weaken and pressure the oil-producers such as Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Iran to undergo economic and political reform in order to further the neo-conservative security though democracy-spreading agenda.[28]

Alkadiri and Mohamedi were sceptical of this aim arguing that the conflict in the area and continuing instability would prevent oil companies from setting up in Iraq as 'they will not throw money down the drain.' They argued that oil companies would only settle once a stable sovereign government before the money, technology and training necessary for the industry will come to Iraq.[29] Peace and the establishment of a functional government has indeed taken far longer than the coalition forces had anticipated with hostilities, insurgency and terrorism continuing to date, so it is understandable that the accomplishment of this goal will have been delayed also. However because of increasing anti-Americanism in the region caused by the war, and because of the pressures created by the War on Terror and the concern of businessmen that their overseas assets could be frozen or nationalised as part of the War on Terror, the Gulf governments have become more focussed on internal trade and businessmen have repatriated funds for investment in local real estate and stock markets, which may have actually strengthened and returned buoyancy to their national economies. The higher prices caused by the Iraq War have also supported the economies. This means that the neo-conservatives have actually benefitted the rentier and authoritarian states.[30]

The Iraq War has undoubtedly not gone according to plan. The Bush administration's intention to 'swoop down from the sky, finish off a regime, pull back and reload the shotgun ready for the next target'[31] stalled as Iraq took far longer and was far more complex than was anticipated. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the links between Saddam and Al Qaeda are unsubstantiated, human rights has had its setbacks, living conditions are poor and there is still ongoing internal conflict and hostility. The oil producing undemocratic regimes of the region are still undemocratic, and anti-Americanism has fuelled extremism in the region which may further endanger the US.

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope

Written by David Sykes

The removal of Saddam Hussein from power has also freed Iran from a long-time enemy and has created instability in the regional balance of power. However, many of the current problems are partly caused by instability and insecurity in the nation, and gradually violence is reducing and so there is a possibility that these problems may be resolved once the new democratic government gains full control. Despite the shortcomings of the other aims of the US-led coalition, democracy has been established in Iraq and so, depending on how successfully the democratic institutions grow and how the system is embraced by the people of Iraq, it might well become a 'bright beacon' in the region which may potentially help to create regional peace and stability.

Bibliography

Gordon, Michael R. & Trainor, Bernard E. 'Iraqi Leader, in Frantic Flight, Eluded U.S. Strikes' New York Times, March 1, 2006, http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/03/12/international/middleeast/12escape.html, retrieved on 18.03.10

Powell, Colin 'Transcript of Powell's UN Presentation' February 6, 2003, CNN, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript/index.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

Milbank, Dana 'Bush Defends Assertions of Iraq-Al Qaeda Relationship', The Washington Post, Friday, June 18, 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A50679-2004Jun17.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

Rogers, Paul 'Terrorism' in Williams, Paul D. 'Security Studies: An Introduction', Routledge, London, 2008, p 178-185

Pincus, Walter & Milbank, Dana 'Al Qaeda-Hussein Link is Dismissed', The Washington Post, Thursday June 17th 2004 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47812-2004Jun16.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

Ravlo, Hilde, Gleditsch, Nils Petter & Dorussen, Han 'Colonial War and the Democratic Peace' Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol 47, no4, August 2003,

Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', International Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003)

Enterline, Andrew J & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy, and Prosperity' The Journal of Politics, Vol. 67, No. 4, Cambridge University Press, (November 2005)

Panke, Diana & Risse, Thomas 'Liberalism' in Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milja & Smith, Steve 'International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity' Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007

Doyle, Michael W 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs' Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 12, No 3, Blackwell Publishing, Summer 1983

Richard Perle, Quoted in Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', International Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003)

Hans J Morgenthau 'A New Foreign Policy for the United States' part 5 'To Intervene, or not to intervene' Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, London, 1969

Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', International Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003)

'Obituary: Saddam Hussein', BBC News, 30.12.2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1099005.stm, retrieved on 18.03.2010

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope

Written by David Sykes

Iraq Body Count, http://www.iraqbodycount.org/, retrieved on 18.03.2010

Stansfield, Gareth, Quoted in Hotsken, Andrew 'Iraq: The Statistics', 'Today Program', BBC Radio 4, http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8487000/8487182.stm, retrieved on 18.03.2010

Al-Ali, Nadje & Pratt, Nicole 'Women in Iraq: Beyond the Rhetoric' *Middle East Report,* No. 239, 'Dispatches from the War Zones: Iraq and Afghanistan', Summer 2006, Middle East Research and Information Project, pp18-23

Alkadiri, Raas & Mohamedi, Freed 'World Oil Markets and the Invasion of Iraq.' *Middle East Report,* No. 227, Summer 2003, Middle East Research and Information Project

Mohamedi, Fareed 'Oil Prices and Regime Resilience in the Gulf' *Middle East Report,* No 232, Autumn 2004, Middle East Research and Information Project, pp36-38

[1] Gordon, Michael R. & Trainor, Bernard E. 'Iraqi Leader, in Frantic Flight, Eluded U.S. Strikes' New York Times, March 1, 2006, http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/03/12/international/middleeast/12escape.html, retrieved on 18.03.10

[2] Powell, Colin 'Transcript of Powell's UN Presentation' February 6, 2003, CNN, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript/index.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

[3] Powell, Colin 'Transcript of Powell's UN Presentation' February 6, 2003, CNN, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript/index.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

[4] Milbank, Dana 'Bush Defends Assertions of Iraq-Al Qaeda Relationship', The Washington Post, Friday, June 18, 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A50679-2004Jun17.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

[5] Rogers, Paul 'Terrorism' in Williams, Paul D. 'Security Studies: An Introduction', Routledge, London, 2008, p 178-185

[6] Pincus, Walter & Milbank, Dana 'Al Qaeda-Hussein Link is Dismissed', The Washington Post, Thursday June 17th 2004 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47812-2004Jun16.html, retrieved on 15.03.2010

[7] Rogers, Paul 'Terrorism' in Williams, Paul D. 'Security Studies: An Introduction', Routledge, London, 2008, p 178-185

[8] Ravlo, Hilde, Gleditsch, Nils Petter & Dorussen, Han 'Colonial War and the Democratic Peace' Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol 47, no4, August 2003, p520-521

[9] Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', *I*nternational Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003) p51

[10] Enterline, Andrew J & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy, and Prosperity' The Journal of Politics, Vol. 67, No. 4, Cambridge University Press, (Nov., 2005), p1075

[11] Panke, Diana & Risse, Thomas 'Liberalism' in Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milja & Smith, Steve 'International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity' Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p90-106

[12] Panke, Diana & Risse, Thomas 'Liberalism' in Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milja & Smith, Steve 'International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity' Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p90-106

[13] Doyle, Michael W 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs' Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 12, No 3, Blackwell Publishing, Summer 1983, p322-325

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope
Written by David Sykes

[14] Ravlo, Hilde, Gleditsch, Nils Petter & Dorussen, Han 'Colonial War and the Democratic Peace' Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol 47, no4, August 2003, p521-523

[15] Ravlo, Hilde, Gleditsch, Nils Petter & Dorussen, Han 'Colonial War and the Democratic Peace' Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol 47, no4, August 2003, p521

[16] Richard Perle, Quoted in Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', *I*nternational Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003), p47

[17] Enterline, Andrew J. & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity', *The Journal of Politics,* Vol. 67, No. 4, November 2005, Cambridge University Press, p1075-1076

[18] Hans J Morgenthau '*A New Foreign Policy for the United States'* part 5 '*To Intervene, or not to intervene'* Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, London, 1969, p131

[19] Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', *I*nternational Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003) p48-49

[20] Byman, Daniel 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', *I*nternational Security, Vol. 28, No. 1, MIT Press, (Summer, 2003) p50

[21] Enterline, Andrew J. & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity', *The Journal of Politics,* Vol. 67, No. 4, November 2005, Cambridge University Press, p1079

[22] Enterline, Andrew J. & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity', *The Journal of Politics,* Vol. 67, No. 4, November 2005, Cambridge University Press, p1089-1090

[23] Enterline, Andrew J. & Greig, J. Michael 'Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy and Prosperity', *The Journal of Politics,* Vol. 67, No. 4, November 2005, Cambridge University Press, p1089-1090-1095

[24] 'Obituary: Saddam Hussein', BBC News, 30.12.2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1099005.stm, retrieved on 18.03.2010

[25] Iraq Body Count, http://www.iraqbodycount.org/, retrieved on 18.03.2010

[26] Stansfield, Gareth, Quoted in Hotsken, Andrew 'Iraq: The Statistics', 'Today Program', BBC Radio 4, http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8487000/8487182.stm, retrieved on 18.03.2010

[27] Al-Ali, Nadje & Pratt, Nicole 'Women in Iraq: Beyond the Rhetoric' *Middle East Report,* No. 239, 'Dispatches from the War Zones: Iraq and Afghanistan', Summer 2006, Middle East Research and Information Project, pp18-23

[28] Alkadiri, Raas & Mohamedi, Freed 'World Oil Markets and the Invasion of Iraq.' *Middle East Report,* No. 227, Summer 2003, Middle East Research and Information Project, p21

[29] Alkadiri, Raas & Mohamedi, Freed 'World Oil Markets and the Invasion of Iraq.' *Middle East Report,* No. 227, Summer 2003, Middle East Research and Information Project, p27

[30] Mohamedi, Fareed 'Oil Prices and Regime Resilience in the Gulf' *Middle East Report,* No 232, Autumn 2004, Middle East Research and Information Project, pp36-38

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq under the Microscope

Written by David Sykes

[31] Mearsheimer, John *'Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism vs Neo-conservatism'* Open Democracy Ltd, 2005, p2

—

Written by David Sykes
Written for: Dr Victoria Mason
Written at: Lancaster University
Date: March 2010

This essay has been recognised with an e-IR essay award (undergraduate)