



School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

**Department of History, Politics and International
Studies**

**(United States Foreign Policy and the Decision to
Invade Iraq in 2003))**

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The Denotation

Heba Kamal Ibrahim Abu-Dari

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Abstract

This thesis discussed the reasons behind the United States' going to war in Iraq in 2003. The U.S government made many arguments about the existence of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of terrorism. Still, this thesis looks deeper into other important things, like long-term political goals, wanting to take control of that part of the region, and specific ideas and beliefs about America's place in the world. Instead of using numbers or data, this study focuses on reading and understanding speeches, policy papers, and academic sources. It is also shaped by neo-constructivist theories. Furthermore, this deep study helps us understand how national ideals, identity, and ideas shaped many decisions. Some of those goals for the invasion are oil, supporting democracy, fear after 9/11, and the effects of many neo-conservative ideas and principles. Also, this thesis shows that the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was not just about the immediate threats that faced the United States of America. Still, it was more about how the United States leaders at that time and especially after the attack on their country's soil, saw the world and what they felt the United States should stand for to avoid any future attacks, also for the demonstration of the dominance that the United States possessed.

Keywords:

U.S. foreign policy, Iraq War 2003, neo-constructivism, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, regime change, Middle East, national identity, oil politics, decision-making, Bush administration, strategic interests, democracy promotion

Chapter one

1.1. Introduction

The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq remains one of the most controversial and consequential foreign policy decisions of the early twenty-first century. Justified by the Bush administration as a necessary response to grave national security threats, the war was framed as a defensive action aimed at disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), dismantling Saddam Hussein's ties to terrorism, and liberating the Iraqi people through democratic transformation. Nevertheless, scholars, policy analysts, and even former government officials have critically reassessed these official justifications in the years following the invasion. The absence of WMDs, the tenuous connections to al-Qaeda, and the post-war instability of Iraq all contributed to growing scepticism about the true motivations behind the decision to go to war (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005). As a result, alternative explanations—ranging from geostrategic objectives and ideological convictions to domestic political pressures—have gained prominence in academic and policy discourse.

This thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by conducting a comprehensive analysis of both the official and alternative rationales for the invasion of Iraq. It explores how the Bush administration justified the war to domestic and international audiences and investigates the broader strategic, ideological, and political factors that may have influenced U.S. decision-making. Central to this inquiry is the question of how competing motivations—security, ideology, power, and politics—interacted within the context of a rapidly changing global environment after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. By examining the historical trajectory of U.S.-Iraq relations, the specific arguments advanced by the administration, and the policy-making process's internal dynamics, the study sheds light on why the United States chose to invade Iraq in March 2003.

At the core of the administration's public case were three interrelated claims: that Iraq possessed active WMD programs, that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaeda and posed a terrorist threat, and that the war would liberate the Iraqi people and bring democracy to the Middle East. The assertion that Iraq continued to develop and conceal WMDs, despite ongoing UN inspections, was repeatedly presented as an urgent threat to international security. In his 2003 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush warned that Saddam Hussein had sought uranium from Africa and retained biological and chemical weapons capabilities, invoking the specter of a "mushroom cloud" as a possible consequence of inaction (U.S. Congress 2002). The credibility of these claims was reinforced through a pattern of strategic communication, intelligence briefings, and high-profile speeches by key figures such as Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations. However, the post-invasion findings of the Iraq Survey Group concluded that Iraq had no active WMD programs at the time of the war, severely undermining the legitimacy of the official narrative (Duelfer 2004).

Equally controversial was the administration's effort to portray Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism with alleged ties to al-Qaeda. Although no credible evidence directly linked Saddam Hussein to the September 11 attacks, repeated references to both Iraq and al-Qaeda in presidential speeches and policy briefings created a public perception of collusion (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005). This rhetorical strategy effectively conflated distinct threats and helped generate support for preemptive action under the broader banner of the "War on Terror." The Bush administration's case for war also drew on moral arguments, notably the claim that removing Saddam Hussein would bring freedom to the Iraqi people and catalyse democratic reform across the Middle East. This Wilsonian justification framed the war as necessary to spread democracy and human rights, consistent with a broader ideological commitment to American exceptionalism and liberal internationalism (Rice 2017).

However, the limitations of these justifications have prompted many scholars to explore alternative explanations for the invasion. One prominent line of analysis emphasises geostrategic interests. From this perspective, the war was not merely about immediate threats but about reshaping the regional balance of power, favouring long-term U.S. interests. Iraq's vast oil reserves, strategic location in the Persian Gulf, and role as a defiant regional actor made it a critical target in post-Cold War American grand strategy (Juhasz 2008). Advocates of this view argue that the Bush administration saw an opportunity to establish a pro-American government in Baghdad, secure access to energy resources, and use Iraq as a base for projecting power across the Middle East. The invasion, in this reading, was as much about demonstrating U.S. hegemony and deterring future challenges as it was about disarming a rogue state (Butt 2019).

A second major alternative explanation centres on the ideological orientation of the Bush administration. In particular, the influence of neoconservative thinkers—such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and Douglas Feith—shaped the administration’s strategic outlook. These figures advocated for the assertive use of American military power to spread democracy and defeat tyrannical regimes, a philosophy rooted in the belief that U.S. hegemony was inevitable and desirable (Halper and Clarke 2004). The Project for a New American Century, a neoconservative think tank, had long called for regime change in Iraq, viewing it as the linchpin for transforming the broader Middle East. The post-9/11 security environment provided a political opportunity to implement these long-held ambitions, merging strategic and ideological imperatives under the guise of national defense (Dodge 2003).

A third explanatory framework considers domestic political factors. The post-9/11 surge in nationalism and public support for military action gave the Bush administration significant latitude to pursue foreign policy objectives without robust scrutiny. The Authorisation for Use of Military Force Against Iraq, passed by Congress in October 2002, provided a broad legal mandate for war and reflected bipartisan alignment on security issues. Some analysts argue that the administration exploited this climate to pursue preexisting goals. In contrast, others point to the electoral benefits of appearing tough on terrorism during the 2002 midterms and the 2004 presidential campaign (Kriner 2014). The role of media, bureaucratic politics, and inter-agency rivalry—particularly between the Pentagon and the State Department—also shaped how information was interpreted and how dissenting voices were sidelined in the run-up to war.

This thesis is organised into three main analytical chapters following this introduction: two, the literature review. This chapter discusses what other researchers have said about the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the main arguments scholars have made about why the invasion happened. These arguments range from official reasons based on democracy and security to critical views based on geopolitical strategy, economic interests, and ideological influence. Chapter three examines the historical and official justifications for the Iraq War. It begins with an overview of U.S.-Iraq relations from the Gulf War to 2003. It proceeds to assess the three main arguments advanced by the Bush administration: the WMD threat, ties to terrorism, and democratic transformation. Chapter four turns to the alternative explanations, evaluating scholarly debates over the role of oil, regional strategy, neoconservative ideology, and domestic politics. Each sub-section critically assesses these factors using a combination of primary and secondary sources. Chapter five analyses the decision-making process itself,

focusing on key actors within the Bush administration—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell—and how their interactions and perspectives shaped the course of policy. This chapter also considers the role of Congress and the institutional mechanisms that facilitated the move to war.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to provide a multidimensional account of the causes of the Iraq War. Rather than privileging a single explanatory model, it adopts a comparative and integrative approach, recognising the interplay of security, ideology, politics, and personal agency. The objective is to identify the most decisive motives and understand how they operated within the U.S. foreign policy's institutional and historical context after 9/11. In doing so, the thesis contributes to broader debates about the uses of military force, the role of ideas in international relations, and the limits of executive decision-making in liberal democracies.

1.2. Methodology

This thesis looks at the reasons and ways the US decided to invade Iraq in 2003 using a qualitative method. It is not about numbers or statistics; it is about knowing what different types of written sources from that time mean, such as political speeches, government records, legislative debates, and news stories. We read these articles to learn how the U.S. government talked to the public about the invasion and what kinds of stories and arguments they used, especially those about terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and spreading democracy (Bush 2003). The study is based on a neo-constructivist point of view. This way of thinking examines how a country's values, beliefs, and sense of self might affect its foreign policy (Checkel 1998; Hopf 2002). This way of looking at things helps us understand that the U.S. response to 9/11 was about protecting its interests and how American leaders saw their country. The thesis looks at the words used and the ideas behind them to show that strategy is not the only thing that goes into making foreign policy decisions. These choices are also affected by values, worldviews, and identities.

Chapter Two

Literature review

Scholarly debate on the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq has focused mainly on many interpretations of its basic motives. Although the Bush regime freely emphasised the removal of weapons of mass destruction and the establishment of democracy, many analysts feel that geopolitical interests—especially those related to oil and regional dominance—had a more important effect. Many academic studies contend that rather than being motivated by urgent dangers or ideological concerns, the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was dominated by long-term strategic economic objectives. Key to this case is how oil symbolically and materially drives the U.S. strategy in the Persian Gulf. Based on his "accumulation by dispossession" thesis, David Harvey argues that the Iraq War was blatantly neoliberal imperialism. From his vantage point, especially in the oil sector, the attack sought to destroy Iraq's state-owned economy and expose it to global money. Harvey views the U.S. engagement as part of a larger plan to spread the influence of global capitalism by forceful methods, not just as a military reaction. Underutilised and nationalised mostly before the conflict, Iraq's enormous oil reserves were a significant focus for this approach. Michael T. Klare also underlines, as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy, the geostrategic relevance of energy security. He contends that maintaining American worldwide power in a world becoming more competitive requires Iraq's oil to be under control. Although the Bush government provided a variety of grounds for war, including WMDs and terrorism, Klare claims that these stories concealed more fundamental issues of maintaining access to petroleum and guaranteeing long-term supremacy in an area essential for the world supply. Though the search for oil has long been the most prominent motivation for U.S. military engagement in the Persian Gulf area, he says, "it is unlikely that U.S. leaders would contemplate such an extreme move without compelling incentives" (Klare 2003, 9). Steven Hurst supports this view even more by placing the invasion in the larger framework of American attempts to maintain Gulf area hegemony. Hurst claims the war was not just a response to 9/11 or Iraqi non-compliance with U.N. resolutions. Instead, it revealed a long-standing tactic meant to stop any regional actor, especially Iran, from leveraging Iraq's resources

and posture to question American supremacy. From this perspective, American calculations were primarily shaped by Iraq's oil riches. These academics contend that geopolitical and economic factors were the leading causes of the invasion, not secondary ones. Their studies question the official U.S. story by implying that the war was used to protect strategic dominance and safeguard material interests. Still, not all researchers agree with this reading. For instance, F. Gregory Gause III views things more cautiously. Although oil is always a consideration in Middle East geopolitics, he contends that there is no evidence from internal Bush administration debates or public remarks supporting the theory that oil drives war chiefly. Rather, Gause underlines the impact of neoclassical philosophy, especially the aim to democratise and change the Middle East in line with a bigger American-led liberal order-building agenda. He suggests that geopolitical and ideological objectives were more important than financial ones, as U.S. policies during the invasion did not prioritise control of the oil infrastructure. Still, Klare questions these denials. Although he admits that other motives—strategic, political, and ideological—were at work, he maintains that oil has always supported U.S. military operations in the area, even if it is not stated clearly. From this perspective, the lack of oil in public discourse does not absolve its driving influence. Instead, it captures the politically delicate character of recognising financial goals in choices on foreign policy. The literature generally offers two opposing points of view: one that emphasises ideological and geopolitical reasons and another that views the Iraq War as essentially connected to strategic economic concerns, notably oil. Although both agree that U.S. decision-making is complex, the former view stresses the ongoing material processes that define military operations. In contrast, the latter stresses the need for values, identity, and long-term vision in foreign policy. Smith takes a more critical and theoretical approach. He argues that the liberal values used to justify the war, like spreading democracy, were a mask for advancing U.S. hegemonic interests. Smith examines how President Bush used language to shape public support for the Iraq invasion. In particular, he focuses on a speech Bush gave in London in late 2003, where the president compared the threat of terrorism to the dangers posed by Nazi Germany before World War II. Bush talked about terrorists who would kill millions if they got weapons of mass destruction and framed the war as a necessary act to stop them. Smith points out that this kind of messaging painted the invasion in moral terms, turning it into a story about good versus evil. Bush also claimed that Iraq was already changing for the better, talking about a freer press, independent

schools, and a police force that protected people instead of harming them. According to Smith, this narrative made it seem like the war was justified and effective, even though the situation on the ground was far more complicated (Smith 2005).

In contrast, Mearsheimer and Walt approach the invasion strategically, contending that the war was unnecessary and based on flawed assumptions. From the very beginning, both made it abundantly plain that they believed that the invasion of Iraq by the United States was a grave error. There was a contention that Saddam Hussein constituted an immediate danger, but they did not believe it. To begin, the proof that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was not overwhelming enough to convince anybody. Regarding Saddam's collaboration with al-Qaeda, they stated that there was no actual connection between the two groups since Saddam was a secular leader who had previously taken action against Islamic radicals in Iraq. It was more about a mixture of ideology and mistaken trust in the strength of the American military, according to their point of view, than it was about the United States' national security. In addition, they cautioned that removing Saddam would result in significant difficulties for the area. These individuals believed that rather than bringing about stability, it would result in a power vacuum and a rise in anti-American sentiment. They believed that Iraq had already been contained, and that the costs of invading the country, both militarily and diplomatically, would be more than any possible benefits there may be. Looking back, it is clear that their forecasts about instability and the repercussions that would occur over the long term were, for the most part, accurate (Mearsheimer and Walt 2003).

Emphasising the regional and sectarian consequences of the war, particularly its long-term geopolitical impact, Amir Haji-Yousefi contributes to the corpus of information on the American invasion of Iraq. Though his work does not primarily address the decision-making process inside the U.S. government, it offers insightful analysis of how the invasion changed the strategic calculations of surrounding Arab governments, especially those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and reordered power structures in Iraq. In both his 2009 and 2013 studies, Haji-Yousefi argues that the removal of Saddam Hussein and the acceptance of a federal, democratic system in Iraq contributed to bringing about a profound political transformation: the ascension of the Shia majority to a dominant presence in government. He notes that while the Iraqi constitution, developed during the post-invasion era, codified federalism and gave minority groups more autonomy, it also inevitably concentrates the Shia community, formerly under Ba'athist control, at the core of national politics. For Haji-

Yousefi, this development was not accidental but rather the predicted outcome of democratisation in a country where most people are Shiite. From this new political reality, Iraq's neighbours would discover tremendous consequences. Many of the GCC countries—many of which operate under Sunni governments—saw the birth of a Shia-led Iraq with tremendous concern, adds Haji-Yousefi. Instead of trying to split the new Iraqi political system, he argues that these countries should accept and engage with it. Otherwise, he warns, they face the risk of allowing foreign players, especially Iran, to form alliances with a Shia-dominated government to have influence. Though he does not explicitly state that enhancing Iraq's Shia majority was the United States' deliberate aim, Haji-Yousefi's research indicates that the invasion fulfilled broader strategic objectives. These include a change of administration and a rearrangement of regional power relations in ways that would challenge present political alliances and damage presently dominant Sunni states. His works suggest that one cannot adequately understand the decision to attack Iraq without considering the long-term regional consequences and the role of sectarian identity in the post-war government.

(Haji-Yousefi, 2013) (Haji-Yousefi, 2009). Moreover, Haji-Yousefi argued that this narrative critically seeks to "foreignise" the Shia identity, distancing it from the Arab and Muslim worlds, a point further examined in the subsequent paragraphs. King Abdullah's concept of a "Shia crescent" evolved into a widespread political narrative among both Arab and non-Arab leaders, significantly influencing the development and mobilisation of the Arab Spring. (Haji-Yousefi, 2009).

One of the most potent voices supporting the American invasion of Iraq, Paul Wolfowitz, significantly shaped the strategic and intellectual underpinning for the war. Under Donald Rumsfeld, he served as Deputy Secretary of Defense. He gained notoriety for his neoclassical views—especially the belief that the United States had an obligation to use its might to advance democracy, particularly in autocratic areas like the Middle East (Dorrien 2004, 43–45).

Wolfowitz's support of a change of government in Iraq predates the Bush presidency. He co-signed a letter advocating President Bill Clinton's pursuit of Saddam Hussein's removal in 1998 via the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). This early appeal to action said that waiting for Saddam to act would be too risky and that Iraq seriously threatened regional

and American interests (PNAC 1998). Iraq was not just a threat—for Wolfowitz and others in PNAC, it was a strategic chance to transform the area.

In Washington, this vision found more open listeners after 9/11. Wolfowitz advocated that Iraq could be a launching pad for more general Middle Eastern democratic transformation. While also contending that the invasion would deter terrorism and authoritarianism in surrounding governments, he presented the invasion as a morally legitimate mission to rescue the Iraqi people from tyranny (Mann 2004, 226–230). These points of view rather faithfully mirrored the larger neoconservative objective of turning American might into a tool for democratic revolution.

Fascinatingly, the most often cited pretext for the invasion—Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction—was not, Wolfowitz said, the leading cause of conflict. He said in a 2003 interview that the emphasis on WMDs was selected as it was the only justification the whole administration could agree upon (Wolfowitz 2003). This revelation generated debate and gave supporters who long believed that strategic objectives, not security concerns, validity.

Since then, Wolfowitz's opinions have been sharply attacked for undervaluing the complexities of post-Saddam Iraq. His too hopeful anticipation that Iraq will rapidly stabilise and turn into a model democracy has put the neoconservative approach into doubt (Fukuyama 2006, 59–63). Still, knowing Wolfowitz's influence helps one to appreciate the larger perspective that resulted in the war—a blend of idealism, strategic ambition, and a conviction of American exceptionalism.

Chapter Three

3.1. Historical background

Shifting geopolitical interests, complex regional dynamics, and global threats influenced the United States' foreign policy towards Iraq over many decades. Beginning with the Cold War and continuing until the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States' forceful containment and, eventually, military intervention. This historical overview describes the significant steps in the United States' strategy that laid the groundwork for the invasion that occurred in 2003.

3.1.1. During the Cold War and the early stages of engagement (1950s–1980s)

During the early stages of the Cold War, the United States' approach focused on exerting less influence on the Middle East. Iraq, which was a monarchy that was linked with the West at the time, was a part of the Baghdad Pact, which was sponsored by the British and intended to counteract the growth of the Soviet Union. The Iraqi coup of 1958, which resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a republican government, was the event that disrupted this alignment. The new leadership deviated from the influence of the West and instead directed its attention to the Soviet Union. As a result, relations between the United States and Iraq deteriorated severely during the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, it is on the periphery of Washington's agenda (United States 2008). One turning moment occurred during the Iran–Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 to 1988. In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which took place in 1979, the United States saw Iran as a more significant threat than Iraq. In 1980, as Iraq launched an offensive on Iran, the Reagan administration adopted a strategy of providing covert support for Baghdad. The United States of America re-established diplomatic ties with Iraq in 1984 and assisted in the form of military assistance, intelligence, and financial support. According to the National Stability Archive (2003), this "tilt" towards Iraq was justified by the need to counteract Iran's influence and provide stability in the Gulf region. The United States of America saw Iraq as a strategic asset against revolutionary Iran, even though Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons and

persecuted those inside his country.

3.1.2. Gulf War (1990–1991) and the change in strategic alliances

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, no subsequent stable state of affairs existed. The world was taken aback by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which resulted in a significant shift in the United States' approach. In the eyes of President George H. W. Bush, the invasion posed a threat to both the established order of the globe and the worldwide oil supply. The United States quickly established a global coalition and obtained UN support for military action. During Operation Desert Storm, which began in January 1991, Iraqi forces were successfully eradicated from Kuwait.

The United States did not pursue regime change even after achieving military victory. Specifically, the Bush administration was concerned that Saddam's ouster would result in instability in the area, notably if it led to the fragmentation of Iraq or a power vacuum that Iran would fill. On the contrary, the United States adopted a containment strategy, with the belief that Saddam would eventually be overthrown by either internal unrest or a coup (Bush 1990).

3.1.3. In the 1990s, sanctions and containment were implemented.

Containment was the unifying principle that defined United States policy during the 1990s. It was under the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton that the United States of America declared no-fly zones over the northern and southern regions of Iraq to protect the Kurdish and Shi'ite populations. Comprehensive sanctions were imposed on Iraq by the United Nations government to prevent the country from reassembling its military or manufacturing weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

In addition, the United States of America supported the United Nations' efforts to conduct weapons inspections via the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). Even though they were successful in reducing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities, the Iraqi regime repeatedly obstructed these inspections. In 1998, tensions increased as a result of Iraq's threat to United Nations diplomats, which led to the start of the Desert Fox campaign.

This bombing campaign lasted four days and included the United States and the United Kingdom (Indyk 1993).

There were humanitarian repercussions associated with containment; it curbed Iraq's regional aggression. The sanctions resulted in a significant amount of suffering among civilians, which led to a decline in international support and prompted condemnation from several humanitarian groups and friends of the United States. In response to these demands, the Clinton administration passed the Iraq Liberation Act, which marked the beginning of the explicit orientation of policy towards regime change. The military efforts continued to focus on containment rather than participation; thus, their impact remained symbolic primarily throughout the whole process.

3.1.4. Post-9/11 Shift and Road to Invasion, for the Years 2001–2003

The events that occurred on September 11, 2001, created a sea shift in the United States' foreign policy. Saddam Hussein began to be seen through the lens of the global War on Terror by the Bush administration, even though Iraq had no direct influence on the attacks. Officials were concerned that terrorists might use Iraq's purported weapons of mass destruction programmed against the United States. Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, and Dick Cheney, the Vice President, were two of the staunchest advocates of military intervention. When President George W. Bush declared Iraq to be a member of the "axis of evil" in 2002, he immediately began crafting arguments in favour of going to war. Despite resolutions passed by the United Nations, the administration continued to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, maintaining that the country posed an urgent threat. In the fall of that year, the United Nations passed Resolution 1441, which mandated that Iraq cooperate with inspections of its weapons. Even when experts returned and found no conclusive evidence of weapons of mass destruction, the United States remained sceptical about Iraq's willingness to cooperate. The United States of America initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003, following the delivery of a final ultimatum to Saddam Hussein. Eliminating weapons of mass destruction, overthrowing Saddam's administration, and establishing democracy in the Middle East were all factors that helped justify the strike. Consequently, the operation transitioned from containment to regime change, ending almost a decade of cautious participation and modest military pressure

(Tarbell

2009).

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the culmination of a protracted and convoluted process of development in United States foreign policy. From the pragmatism of the Cold War and limited aid during the Iran-Iraq War to containment and sanctions in the 1990s to the emphasis on preemption and regime change that emerged after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the policies reflected the changing perceptions of risk and opportunity. When we have a better understanding of these historical periods, we are better able to comprehend how policies made by the United States ultimately led to the decision to invade Iraq.

3.2. The United States' reasons for the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

The United States of America has worried over Iran since its 1979 revolution. U.S. policy towards Iraq saw Iraq as a counterpoint to Iran's increasing sway. The U.S. gave Saddam Hussein's regime meagre support during the Iran-Iraq War via information cooperation and financial aid (Brands, 2012). Nevertheless, with Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, this relationship sank drastically, and the Gulf War followed in 1991. The coalition, headed by the United States, drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait. Iraq was subject to severe UN sanctions and weapon inspections meant to destroy its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in the aftermath. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist strikes, the United States drastically changed the emphasis of its foreign policy. Although the military first concentrated on al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, Iraq soon became of interest. The Bush administration offered three key justifications for preemptive military involvement between 2002 and early 2003, which are the following:

3.2.1. Weapons of Mass Destruction

Under the supervision of Saddam Hussein, Iraq produced biological and chemical weapons (CIA 2002), as well as missiles that were designed to strike countries that were located in the surrounding area. There have been several instances in which the Iraqi government has confessed that it has a desire to possess weapons of mass destruction (WMDS) (CIA 2002). The

Iraqi government has made significant efforts to develop nuclear weapons. Saddam Hussein utilised chemical weapons against Kurdish people in the late 1980s and during the Iran-Iraq War (Duelfer 2004). This occurred much before the United Nations inspectors were ejected from Iraq in 1998. Despite its inherent limitations, the intelligence collected from clandestine sources has significantly assessed Iraq's strategic objectives and military capabilities. Instead of seeing weapons of mass destruction as a last resort, Saddam saw them as an essential component of Iraq's strategy for achieving regional dominance, as stated by these reports (Iraq Survey Group 2004). According to the National Intelligence Council, published in 2002, he was adamant about maintaining them and seemed prepared to use them against his people. The Iraqi authorities were preparing to cover up evidence of the weapons of mass destruction program that was being inspected, perhaps by transferring sensitive documents and equipment, according to further data that was discovered (National Data Council 2002). According to analysts and experts in the intelligence community, Saddam placed a high strategic significance on maintaining a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons because he believed that having such weapons was essential for gaining respect and influence in the region (Duelfer, 2004). Intelligence sources indicate that Saddam is dedicated to preserving this capacity, so relying only on reduced conventional forces would reduce Iraq's political impact (National Intelligence Council 2002). The JIC said in early 2002 that Iraq was building missiles with a range of more than 1,000km (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002). Sanctions would stop Iraq from manufacturing such a weapon, which, before the 2007 sanctions and prior inspections, presented significant difficulties with missile development for the country. Iraq, therefore, stepped up its attempts to import missiles from other countries. The JIC also learnt that Iraq kept missiles from before the Gulf War (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002).

3.2.2. Links to Al-Qaeda

The administration of the United States stressed Ansar al-Islam in Iraq. This point made by Secretary of State Powell at the U.N. was relevant to al-Qaeda's presence in Iraq (Powell 2003). After the Taliban and al-Qaeda were defeated in Afghanistan in late 2001, Arab al-Qaeda members fled to Iraq and joined the Ansar movement, raising U.S. concerns (Byman 2005). At its peak, 600 Arab fighters were in the Ansar al-Islam enclave near Khurmal, one of Iraq's two

main Kurdish parties (Pillar 2004). In December 2002, America justified its military confrontation with Saddam Hussein by citing Baghdad's ties to Ansar al-Islam. This argument had UN support (Risen 2004). So, Zarqawi. After the 2003 invasion, whose full name is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian militant with ties to al-Qaeda, became a key figure in the Iraqi insurgency. He helped increase sectarian violence by coordinating attacks on Shia communities (Bergen 2006). A close Saddam Hussein ally, he may not have acted. He led his group into Saddam's Kurdish enemies' territory (Katzman 2003).

The administration claims Saddam supported Ansar's pressure on northern Iraq's Kurdish opponents, in Halabja, one of Iraq's two main Kurdish factions. (Powell 2003). The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), one of Iraq's two main Kurdish factions alongside the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), has played a significant role in shaping Kurdish autonomy and relations with both Baghdad and foreign powers (Gunter 2004). Ansar gunmen tried to assassinate Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih in April 2002 (Katzman 2003). The U.S. would have intervened. He successfully led his group into Saddam's Kurdish enemies' territory. According to the administration, Saddam helped Ansar pressure his northern Iraqi Kurdish opponents (Byman 2005).

Baghdad's ties to Ansar al-Islam justified American military action against Saddam Hussein (Risen 2004). Some reports question Baghdad's ties to Ansar al-Islam and Zarqawi; The administration thinks Saddam helped Ansar pressure his northern Iraqi Kurdish opponents (Pillar 2004). Baghdad's ties to Ansar al-Islam justified American military action against Saddam Hussein. The UN argued this was the case (Powell 2003). However, some accounts question Baghdad's Ansar al-Islam ties before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Risen 2004; Pillar 2004).

3.2.3. Promotion of Democracy

Before the 9/11 attacks, the region's passionate support for democracy was a matter of deep conviction. Before 9/11, George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice adhered to a "realist" foreign policy emphasising stability over democracy (Rosen 2004). They shifted to a messianic "freedom" mission solely following the attacks. Rice emerged as a passionate advocate for peace through democracy, which is surprising due to the country's actions for sixty years. The government has sought stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East, and neither has

been achieved (Rice 2002). They were presently undertaking a different approach, endorsing the democratic ambitions of all individuals. Conversely, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld have consistently failed to exhibit any genuine concern for the democratic prospects of Iraq. They repeatedly prioritised the ouster of Saddam Hussein over democratic governance and nation-building in Iraq (Bello 2021). When given the option, they favoured a strategically cooperative authoritarian Iraq rather than a hostile democratic Iraq. They opposed using U.S. military forces to reorganise the world according to American ideals. In conclusion, they were restricted from using contemporary American political science terminology, such as democratic imperialists, and were instead required to use traditional nationalists. President Bush's February 2003 address at the American Enterprise Institute underscored the significance of transformation. He further emphasised the concept in his address on March 17, during which he gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave the country. He claimed that, unlike Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi people are competent and worthy of human liberty (Bush 2003).

Following the dictator's exit, they may exemplify a self-governing, tranquil, and dynamic nation in the Middle East. The substitution of dictatorship with democracy, even if enforced by an external authority, would convert Iraq from an aggressor into a peaceful nation, thus abolishing its designation as a threat to global security (Bush 2003). Bush and neoconservatives asserted that Islamist terrorism stemmed from the economic stagnation of the Arab world and the dominance of autocratic regimes. Thus, they contended that democracy would mitigate terrorism (Bush 2003). On September 7, 2003, Bush proclaimed in a televised address that they were promoting the establishment of a democratic and just society in Iraq, at the heart of the Middle East. The Middle East will either evolve into a realm of peace and advancement or persist as a source of terror and violence, resulting in further casualties in the United States and other democratic nations (Bush 2003).

International terrorism would experience a significant decline if democracy and tolerance thrived in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas. Assistance from tyrants and the discontent of oppressed groups facilitate the success of terrorists. People from diverse cultures are renouncing terrorist ideologies and adopting peace initiatives as tyrants fall and resentment transforms into hope. Terrorism will decrease in areas where liberty prevails (Bush 2003). Bush and Rice, previously identifying as realists, embraced the democratic peace theory. This theory asserts that democracies are inherently peaceful towards each other, indicating that the most effective means to ensure the long-term security of America and the globe is to advocate for democratic

processes globally (Rice 2005). The 9/11 attacks and the influence of neoconservatism contributed to this theory. The Bush administration's approach suggested that the United States ought to use its power to contest the global status quo, including the application of military force to overthrow tyrannical regimes. The assertion indicated that the United States should not concede to any limitations on the application of force imposed by international entities, allies, or partners, owing to the inherent justness of America's global objectives (Bush 2003).

Along with the neoconservatives, George W. Bush believed that the primary reason for Islamic terrorism was the widespread presence of autocratic rule and economic stagnation in the Arab world. They believed that democratisation would be a panacea for terrorists. President George W. Bush broadcast a statement on television on September 7, 2003, stating that the disease of terrorism has its origins in the prevalence of autocratic rule and economic stagnation in the Arab world:

“In Iraq, we are helping... to build a decent and democratic society at the centre of the Middle East... The Middle East will either become a place of progress and peace, or it will be an exporter of violence and terror that takes more lives in America and other free nations. The triumph of democracy and tolerance in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond would be a grave setback for international terrorism. The terrorists thrive on the support of tyrants and the resentments of oppressed peoples. When tyrants fall, and resentment gives way to hope, men and women in every culture reject the ideologies of terror and turn to the pursuits of peace. Everywhere that freedom takes hold, terror will retreat.” (Bush 2003).

The neoconservatives and their prominent associates within the White House and the Department of Defense emphasised the significance of power dynamics and reputation in their advocacy for military engagement. They contended that the conflict was more reflective of the United States' position than being primarily focused on Iraq, particularly within the framework of the post-Soviet landscape (Ryan 2010). The focus was on maintaining the United States' dominant position in international military affairs and fostering the necessary political resolve to wield that dominance in alignment with the nation's core universal values. The objective was to overcome the Vietnam syndrome and the debilitating constraints imposed by the Weinberger-Powell doctrine (Record 2005). This initiative sought to persuade the global community—friends and foes—that a shift was occurring from deterrence and containment to military preemption. The discourse focused on the inherent hubris of authority, stifling pragmatism and

collaborative approaches through the imposition of values and a preference for unilateral actions (Ahmad 2013).

Chapter four

- Alternative Explanations for the Invasion

1. Geostrategic Interest

1.1. Control over Middle Eastern oil and energy security.

While it is indeed accurate that terrorism, particularly the September 11, 2001, attacks, expedited the impetus for war in 2003, an excessive emphasis on 9/11 neglects the longstanding militarisation of oil and its producers, the significant role of oil in regional conflicts over the past four decades, and the historical connections between confrontations with Iraq and previous attempts (Mitchell 2011; Khalidi 2004).

The perception of Middle Eastern oil often aligns with considerations of the US national security. The United States views the Persian Gulf as a strategically significant region due to its abundant energy resources (Klare 2004). The interconnectedness of the global economy fundamentally depends on the continuous flow of Gulf oil, which is crucial for sustaining U.S. interests over the long term (Yergin 2009). While the discourse surrounding U.S. strategy in Iraq continues, some may argue that the underlying strategic rationale remains unchallenged (Painter 2012). Certain conclusions can be drawn by evaluating the strength of the United States' position in the Gulf and the necessity of maintaining a military presence in that region (Stokes 2007).

The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and subsequent American military occupation marked a continuation of American militarism in the Middle East (Bacevich 2005). The Iraq War was a culmination of decades of strategic contemplation and policymaking regarding oil. However, it was larger in scale, duration, and destruction than prior military interventions in the region (Harvey 2003).

The relationship between oil and warfare has intensified in the Middle East. Indeed, that relationship has become ostensibly permanent. The U.S.'s oil policy has contributed to this outcome, and the U.S. has been involved in the conflict (Klare 2004). The sanctions regime,

ostensibly justified as a mechanism to compel Iraq to relinquish its weapons of mass destruction program, effectively served as an extension of the regime change policy that culminated in the 2003 American invasion of Iraq (The National Security Archive 2003).

The growing propensity of the United States to employ force and violence to secure oil flow to global markets signifies not American strength, but its limitations (Stokes 2007). Prevailing political discourse in the United States frequently characterises Americans and their governments as unwitting victims of detrimental and unsustainable dependency or deceived by duplicitous oil producers (Mitchell 2011). Breaking the addiction to oil is undoubtedly prudent; however, it necessitates confronting the historical context of that dependency and the various costs associated with it (Painter 2012). Despite this, there is little evidence that any such reassessment is taking place. The United States seems poised to continue on a well-trodden and familiar path. The U.S.'s strategy means that as it concludes its current oil conflict, its military and political planners are already preparing for future conflicts by building ties with oil-producing countries, particularly precarious ones, and linking these relationships to national security (Bacevich 2005).

The growing propensity of the United States to employ force and violence to secure oil flow to global markets signifies not American strength, but its limitations (Klare 2004). Prevailing political discourse in the United States frequently characterises Americans and their governments as unwitting victims of detrimental and unsustainable dependency or deceived by duplicitous oil producers (Mitchell 2011). However, confronting that dependency's historical context and various costs necessitates confronting it (Painter 2012). However, there is little evidence that any such reassessment is taking place. The United States seems poised to persist on a well-trodden course. The U.S. is likely to continue on a familiar path. The U.S.'s strategy of building ties with oil-producing countries, particularly precarious ones, and linking these relationships to national security means that as the U.S. concludes its current oil conflict, its military and political planners are already preparing for future conflicts (Stokes 2007).

1.2. Removing a hostile regime to reshape the regional order

The United States demonstrates a deficiency in understanding the historical and political context surrounding Iraq (Dodge 2005). In the process of establishing the interim government, the United States overlooked the historical nuances of Iraq, where democratic traits have been mainly absent due to a longstanding legacy of authoritarianism and sectarian strife (Marr 2012).

The U.S.'s decision to marginalise the Sunni minority while consolidating power with the Shiite majority has exacerbated this situation (Hashim 2006). Consequently, establishing a democratic government founded on the principle of equal rights proved to be a formidable challenge, primarily due to the fragmented nature of Iraqi ethnic society (Dawisha 2009). Washington should have prioritised resolving ethnic conflicts and disparities before establishing a democratic government. Furthermore, the pre-existing historical sectarian tensions in Iraq have been worsened by the actions of the U.S., leading to a deeper division within Iraqi society (Allawi 2007).

The shortcomings of the United States can be traced back to the absence of legitimacy surrounding the invasion, as it has been articulated that “the desire for regime change is not a legal basis for military action” (United Nations 2004). Nevertheless, before the invasion, it was evident that the United States had recognised that Saddam did not constitute a threat, as elucidated in the *Downing Street Memorandum* (Rycroft 2002). The invasion resulted in a profoundly challenging scenario for Iraq, necessitating a comprehensive reconstruction of virtually all aspects, including military, governance, and fundamental infrastructure services (Chandrasekaran 2006).

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The biggest irony is that a military operation meant to showcase the United States' strength quickly became a clear example of the limitations of its traditional military power and the American public's ongoing aversion to prolonged engagements against unconventional adversaries (Record 2007). The primary strategic beneficiaries of the Iraq War appear to be Iran, China, and Al-Qaeda, while both the United States and Iraq seem to have gained little (Pillar 2006; Bacevich 2008). The Iraq War is anticipated to have a similarly debilitating effect on the future use of military force by the United States as the Vietnam syndrome, which has faced significant criticism from neoconservative factions (Ricks 2006; Boot 2003).

The United States wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein's government, not just to get rid of a long-time enemy, but also to change the geopolitical balance in the Middle East in a manner that would be good for U.S. interests. A pro-American Iraq that was no longer run by a hostile Ba'athist state was seen to be a good example of liberal change in the area and a way to resist Iranian influence. In principle, a stable, democratic Iraq may help bring political change in nearby authoritarian countries while protecting American economic and geopolitical interests, especially military access and oil security (Dodge 2006).

2. Ideological Factors

2.1. Neoconservative influence

The events of September 11th presented conservatives with an opportunity to promote assertive U.S. military involvement in Iraq (Smith 2008). Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, prominent figures within the Department of Defense, consistently devoted themselves to Saddam's downfall, enlisting Vice President Cheney to bolster their initiatives. Rumsfeld demonstrated his expertise in committee meetings by championing this option, using his negotiation skills and keen insight into power dynamics to protect his department and his standing. In the aftermath of the crisis, neoconservatives seized the moment, as Yetiv illustrated in "Looking at Iraq Through the Lens of 9/11" (Yetiv 2011, 239), highlighting Wolfowitz as the primary architect behind the government's initiative for regime change.

The neoconservatives' vigorous discussion regarding the likelihood of direct military cooperation concurrently attributed a significant role to the State Department within the context of the Iraq plans.

The political situation following 9/11 hindered Bush's attempts to understand the problem, resulting in a brief discussion. The disputes involving Secretary of State Powell, those who signed PNAC, Cheney, and Rumsfeld highlighted the challenges faced by the NSC and Advisor Condoleezza Rice. (Woodward 2006, 241).

The administration adopted a primarily individual approach rather than a collective strategy. Rumsfeld and Cheney's partnership outmanoeuvred Secretary of State Colin Powell's by skillfully navigating through the complexities of the bureaucracy and narrowing down the available options. (Yetiv 2011, 240). The neoconservative ideology significantly influenced

Bush's perspective on the issue at hand. Eventually, he tasked Rumsfeld and Cheney with the vital job of "laying the groundwork" for the president's firm decision-making to engage militarily in Iraq and shape U.S. foreign policy. (Smith 2008, 101).

President Bush Jr's close circle operated with a shared mindset. His advisors reached a consensus, leading him to consider an invasion plan. Collective thinking is described as a way of thinking that people take on when they are involved in a close-knit group, where the desire for everyone to agree takes priority over looking at other options critically. Group thinking tends to occur more often when people share similar views or have a close bond with each other. This situation shows how isolated the group is and how determined the leader is in pushing for their beliefs. It was clear that Bush's advisers were on the same page about many different things. One of the things that caught Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's attention about Iraq was the sheer amount of military hardware concentrated in that region. Top administration officials like Colin Powell and George Tenet expressed concerns about starting a war in Iraq. Janis points out that Bush's close circle has a few outstanding issues. There is the "illusion of invulnerability" that made people feel overly confident about taking risks; the way dissenting opinions were pushed aside; the "mind guards" who kept out information that did not fit the group's view; and collective rationalisation, which stopped the group from reconsidering its beliefs when faced with conflicting information. Bush's inner circle has these traits and a sense of isolation, tension, and pressure. (Janis 1972, 9) Bush Jr's tight-knit circle of conservatives teamed up with dissidents to support the majority and pushed for faster military action in the wake of the 9/11 crisis. At that time, conversations were limited and restricted. Garrison points out that most people favoured tough military actions and did not have many choices (Garrison 2003, 177-183). This pattern started with Bush, Rumsfeld, and Cheney, who took on a strong leadership role in the group. They also used their roles to urge Powell, Tenet, and other colleagues not to back the invasion. Despite his reservations, they claimed that the group strongly supported the Bush Doctrine and influenced President Bush to proceed by persuading Secretary of State Powell to support the invasion. Furthermore, Rumsfeld and Cheney limited or held back the group's access to information that went against what they both believed. Cheney, acting as the "praetorian guard" for the neocons around Bush, made it tough for him to get a grasp on "honest, disinterested perspectives about what is real" and other opinions (Suskind 2004, 293). Powell could always rely on Cheney showing up whenever he set up a private meeting with Bush Jr to discuss options apart from invasion. After their talks with Bush, Powell thought Cheney was

trying to make him look like he was not part of the team (Woodward 2006, 226). The US Department of Defense, acting as its headquarters, keeps the group under wraps to ensure no one can access the CIA's unbiased findings. The Defense Department set up the OSP after the CIA found either insufficient evidence or conflicting information about any links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. The OSP had earlier shared some concerns about Iraq's connection to 9/11 and was searching for information to back up their worries (Badie 2010, 289).

2.2. The belief in US hegemony and the "unipolar moment."

The geopolitical context facilitated the United States' emergence as a hegemon, granting it worldwide political leadership (Bozdaglioglu, 2013). In the following years, U.S. dominance strengthened, allowing it to affect the internal politics of other countries (Beyer, 2007).

Hegemony, originating from the Greek phrase Hegemonia, signifies 'leadership'. International politics denotes the 'ascendancy of one state over others'. Within international politics (Gilpin, 2004), a hegemon is a leader or sovereign governing other nations in the global community. As a hegemon, the dominant power must have the capacity, determination, and dedication to uphold the regulations of the international system, promoting a mutually advantageous atmosphere for significant nations. The hegemon's power often depends on a strong economy, technical superiority, political stability, and military might. In the post-Cold War period, the United States became a hegemonic power due to its expanding economy, technical supremacy, political stability, and strong military might.

John Ikenberry astutely observed the United States' dominance, characterising it as a "global unipolar power" with unparalleled military and geopolitical capabilities. Notwithstanding the geographical distance separating the U.S. from the Middle East, the area is pivotal in U.S. foreign policy.” (Ikenberry John, 2005: 359)

The United States has continually exerted its influence over the internal politics of several Middle Eastern nations to safeguard its national interests. Pelletreau delineates these interests as the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace, bolstering Israel's security, averting crises, guaranteeing the unobstructed flow of oil from the Gulf, combating terrorism, and restraining rogue regimes (Pelletreau 1996, 429-432).

Keohane defines it as a state's readiness to implement fundamental principles of international relations and exercise adequate authority. Hegemony refers to the dominant position of the state within the global political structure. From an economic standpoint, it indicates a nation's control over capital assets, essential goods, and valuable commodities. (Keohane 1984)

In 2000, reports from human rights organisations indicated that armed factions were systematically training and recruiting youths, with Ashbal Saddam being a notable example of this trend. Ashbal Saddam managed the identification system and its oversight. Furthermore, Richard Butler, Executive Chairman of UNSCOM, asserts that Iraq has biological weapons and missiles that may represent a considerable threat to Tel Aviv. Kofi Annan's substantial contributions to fostering dialogue remain unrecognised by the United States, which has not expressed any appreciation. The effectiveness and ethical considerations of UNSCOM's initiatives raised concerns. (Rai & Chomsky, 2002).

According to the UN assessment, Resolution 1441 constituted a conclusive chance for disarmament initiatives. The United States has issued a warning that Iraq may face "serious consequences" if it fails to comply. (Powell, 2003, 276). In 2003, the United Nations did not issue a supplementary resolution. The administration's anger peaked with an illegal invasion of Iraq, conducted without sufficient international support or compelling evidence of weapons of mass destruction. The subsequent events highlighted the complex dynamics and contentious discussions about the invasion.

The United States regarded Saddam Hussein's regime as a considerable threat, mainly because Iraq violated resolutions related to humanitarian abuses and the spread of atomic weapons following the Gulf War. The events of September 11, 2001, drew a significant shift in Iraq's strategic approach. As a result, the U.S. adopted diplomatic pressure. Initiated in 2003, the operation sought to dismantle Saddam Hussein's regime, reduce terrorist threats, offer support, and safeguard Iraq's critical hydrocarbon resources. (Bassil, 2012, 29-47).

The incursion, marked by difficulties in confirming the presence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, prompted a thorough investigation into the fundamental reasons for U.S. involvement.

3. Domestic Political Factors

3.1. Bush administration's post-9/11 militarism and public opinion.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have influenced the emergence of a new paradigm in U.S. international involvement. These conflicts symbolise the United States' initiation of large-scale military operations as a preemptive strategy against "potential" threats, representing a transition from defensive tactics to "preemptive" attacks. Condoleezza Rice, the current Secretary of State and former National Security Advisor, is primarily responsible for advocating for the 'doctrine of preemption', which Noam Chomsky has publicly criticised as being abused by the Bush administration. He emphasises that this concept has historically granted the U.S. military the authority to interdict aircraft that are en route to an attack on the United States and demolish the facilities from which they were launched.

(Chomsky, 2003, 16) argued that the Bush administration advocated for a "preventive war" based on the principle of preemptive warfare. This philosophy grants the United States the distinctive capacity to execute military operations under specific circumstances, prompting substantial apprehension regarding its potential consequences.

The United States government defines the parameters of a "perceived" threat, with the international community wholly absent. The United States may employ this position to justify the initiation of military operations against any nation that it deems to be in opposition to its interests. Chomsky defines a preemptive conflict as responding to an imminent or ongoing attack. Proponents of the preventive war theory contend that the United States is entitled to launch a preemptive assault against any nation that is perceived as a potential threat. Assume that the United States believes an individual may pose a possible danger in the future for any reason. In this situation, the United States may consider taking preemptive action against the individual.

The conventional interpretation of "preemption" was surpassed by the concept that the Bush administration espoused in the president's national security policy address in September 2002. (Rice, 2002) contends that technological advances necessitate reevaluating the criteria for determining whether a hazard is "imminent," which refers to the urgency and likelihood of a threat occurring soon. This redefinition elucidates the fundamental concept that underpins this novel methodology.

Vidal underscored the perspectives of American political leaders regarding the impending catastrophe. Vidal emphasised that the United States dominated globally. In addition to

surpassing the bounds of common sense, we may also surpass legal boundaries, a trait frequently associated with an empire (Vidal 2002a, 105).

It is imperative to discuss the concept of modern militarism from a different perspective.

Consistency is evident in the nation's foreign policy and proclivity for colonial military engagement. It is not wholly novel to assert that the United States' objectives and expanding military presence should be global. The United States has repeatedly demonstrated this imperialistic perspective throughout its history. The nation's leaders have consistently employed military force to achieve specific objectives, primarily those that are financially and politically influential.

This phenomenon has endured throughout the twentieth century. As a result, it is possible to assert that the New Militarism is not a novel concept but rather a steadfast addition to the United States' foreign policy and the propensity of the nation's political leaders to employ extensive violence to advance the interests of the superior individuals with whom they are associated. Examining U.S. political actions and interventions can lead to this understanding.

March 20th, 2003, at dawn, the United States commenced Operation Iraqi Freedom with scant resources. We anticipated multiple defeats. Polls indicate that 70% of the populace supported the invasion. The majority of the populace anticipated a prolonged conflict that would harm the economic standing of the United States, and most individuals believed that an invasion of Iraq would raise the likelihood of terrorist activities within the U.S. The United Nations did not authorise the action; in that regard, Russia and France, both members of the Security Council, committed to veto any resolution that might precipitate war. Regardless of the discovery of weapons of mass destruction Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, the situation escalated. (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, *The Macro Polity*, 2002)

President Bush never expressly assigned culpability to Saddam Hussein. Despite Iraq's lack of direct participation in the September 11 attacks, the continuous association of Iraq with terrorism and al-Qaeda created a framework that enabled such a connection. (White House 2001)

The public seeks to augment their understanding and substantially elevate their news consumption. Furthermore, it is recognised that ignorant Americans seek counsel from opinion leaders, and often the elite's interpretation of events rather than the facts themselves profoundly shapes public opinion. (Cohen, 1963) Essentially, those who regulate language dominate the conversation; those who manage the discourse are more likely to translate belief into policy

efficiently. Issue frameworks shape individuals' perspectives and the importance they attribute to specific concepts. (Jamieson and Waldman 2003)

Americans are primarily political. Despite being misled, some individuals have strong attitudes about warfare. U.S. people often respond adversely to international wars necessitating the deployment of foot troops since they foresee considerable American losses. Moreover, they frequently endorse international projects. Such behaviour makes the significant, unequivocal endorsement of the war in Iraq especially surprising.

In times of war and national disasters, Americans coalesce to uphold the flag, markedly increasing their support for the president. Support for the president is neither particular nor lasting. This concept is particularly applicable in circumstances that lead to American casualties. We contend that the rally-around-the-flag phenomenon significantly bolstered support for the war in Iraq. This support's quantity and unconditional character suggest that spontaneous patriotism alone cannot account for it. (Mueller, 1973)

The mobilisation of support for the military effort prompts enquiries about the claims we might make regarding its efficacy. What are the moral implications for democratic theory? Initially, we may be concerned by the absence of significantly prominent personalities and media coverage before the war. (Zaller 1992) Public attitude depends on political leaders' rhetoric, and the restricted dialogue over the war and tactics facilitated considerable support for an unprecedented unilateral preemptive foreign policy. This support does not suggest that Americans would have opposed the war, despite protests from Democrats or the media; rather, their shift in favour may not have been as comprehensive or swift. Anti-war protesters were outspoken on city streets; a wider public dialogue may have emerged with more specialised discussions. (Page, 1996)

Some fear that referencing the September 11th, 2001, tragedy may garner significant popular support for any military action initiated by the president, primarily because invoking such a pivotal event might restrict free discourse and accountability. (Jamieson and Waldman 2003).

President Bush's government implicated the Iraq invasion as a continuation of his reaction to 9/11 and the overarching fight against terrorism. This discourse encountered no resistance from decision-makers, resulting in a unilateral distribution of information to the American public. (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003)

The language of the Bush administration received heightened scrutiny due to the surge in television news viewing during the Iraq War. It was asserted that the American public's image

of the Iraq War was profoundly shaped by 9/11, which strengthened support for the fight. The characterisation of the Iraq war as a war on terror is not only a consequence of statistical anomalies or our methodological framework. Despite the lack of concrete evidence, President George W. Bush insisted that Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were related. Although this link was not always obvious, it was frequently mentioned in public statements, influencing public opinion regarding the invasion. Scholars have noted that many Americans were able to link Iraq to the 9/11 attacks because the government used the broader "War on Terror" to contextualise the country (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005). Bush's 2006 statement that "Saddam and al-Qaeda work together" strengthened the notion that the two were collaborating (White House 2006). In answer to queries about the September 11 attacks, Bush expressed his belief that Iraq had a hand in the events that occurred six days after the tragedy in 2001. The Bush administration saw the U.S. reaction to the tragic terrorist attacks as a worldwide war on terrorism, focusing on Afghanistan and other countries, including Iraq, as detailed in Bob Woodward's account of National Security Council sessions. Consequently, it appears that President Bush saw a relation between September 11th and Iraq. (Woodward, *Bush at War*, 2002)

Chapter Five

The Decision-Making Process

There were a lot of political, ideological, and strong national identity stories that led to the decision to strike Iraq in 2003. The Bush administration focused on threats that were about to happen, like weapons of mass destruction and supposed ties to al-Qaeda. However, disagreements within the government and later investigations revealed that these reasons were part of a bigger plan to change the Middle East and make the US the most powerful country in the world again after 9/11 (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005; Duelfer 2004). From a neo-constructivist perspective, money was not the only factor influencing their actions. They were based on the idea that the US had a special duty to lead the world and change the way it works so that it follows US values (Hopf 2002; Checkel 1998). Bush and his closest advisers were important people in the administration who thought that changing how Iraq was run would make it more democratic and stable, even if it meant lying about intelligence to get support at home and ignoring what the rest of the world thought (Bush 2003; White House 2006).

1. Key Actors Involved in the Decision to Invade Iraq

A tiny handful of top Bush administration officials greatly influenced the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq. These included Secretary of State Colin Powell, Vice President Dick Cheney, President George W. Bush, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Every actor saw Iraq differently, hence their impact on the ultimate choice was not equal. These variations played out in a policy environment molded more by inner-circle influence and personal belief than formal debate. Although Bush finally decided, the preceding procedure revealed how internal conflicts—especially between Powell and the more hawkish Cheney and Rumsfeld—were controlled rather than addressed. Though his approach to decision-making tended to favour speed and moral clarity over procedural detail, President Bush possessed ultimate power. After 9/11, Bush's perspective changed to one wherein inactivity was seen as harmful, particularly regarding allegedly renegade governments. He thought Saddam Hussein was a danger to the Middle East as well as the globe and that military action was a reasonable and required reaction. However, that belief

drove Bush to depend mainly on a limited number of advisers endorsing a military-first strategy, usually at the cost of more thorough debate or criticism (Pfiffner 2018). Though not in the conventional sense of investigating many policy routes, Bush did engage his National Security Council. He seldom permitted thorough internal discussion, which made it difficult for more circumspect views like Powell's to find resonance. Among the most outspoken supporters of the invasion was Vice President Cheney. He had voiced substantial doubt about the efficacy of diplomacy or sanctions in lowering Saddam's aspirations well before the war started. Cheney presented Iraq as a clear and immediate danger more and more after 9/11. Assertions lacking solid intelligence backup at the time, his public comments sometimes claimed confidence regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and alleged ties between Saddam and terrorism (Pfiffner 2018). Cheney's proximity to Bush, impact on the Pentagon, and control over intelligence debates allowed him to affect public and internal opinion. He was very critical of delay or compromise and preferred proactive action. His participation greatly helped the government present the war as essential and urgent. Although Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, adopted Cheney's belligerent posture, his priorities were implementation over rationale. He thought the U.S. military should be more nimble and less reliant on massive force deployment. He advocated for a fast invasion strategy employing relatively modest numbers of troops against military experts who cautioned that more soldiers would be required for postwar stability (Ricks 2006). Rumsfeld thought Iraq would soon stabilise following Saddam's demise and had little tolerance for nation-building. His choices during the planning stage, especially regarding force numbers and marginalising interagency advice, had long-lasting effects on the U.S. occupancy. His opinions also often matched Cheney's, therefore supporting the pro-war consensus developing around Bush. By contrast, Colin Powell distinguished himself from his peers. Powell was dubious about going to war as Secretary of State and a former commander. More diplomacy, more international buy-in, and more forward preparation for what would happen after Saddam was gone were constant demands from him. Powell was crucial in persuading Bush to visit the United Nations in late 2002 in search of more general support and a last-ditch pressure on Saddam (Rosen 2004). Powell's impact was somewhat limited, however. Many sources say his opinions were heard but not given any weight. Often left out of the close inner circle where important choices were taken, his caution was seen as opposition. Powell's ultimate public backing for the war—especially his 2003 UN address arguing for Iraqi WMDs—came after his general marginalisation in internal

discussions (Ricks 2006). His reputation gave the government a potent rhetorical weapon, but it also highlighted how a dissident voice had been transformed into a mouthpiece for a choice already taken.

Examining the contacts among Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Powell reveals that the U.S. decision-making process in the run-up to the Iraq War was more motivated by personalities and ideology than by organised discussion. Urgency replaced thought after 9/11. Bush mostly relied on Cheney and Rumsfeld, who advocated military action and presented Iraq as a more general danger to U.S. security and worldwide reputation (Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Pfiffner 2018). Though revered, Powell was often excluded from meaningful conversations or brought in after choices were already taken. Though his opinions never took hold in the final strategy (Ricks 2006; Pfiffner 2018), he encouraged diplomacy and international involvement.

Remarkably, internal conflicts persisted even as the government put on a united face for public consumption. There was no well-defined mechanism for considering alternatives—strategies like protracted inspections, containment, or actual diplomatic pressure were momentarily accepted and then rapidly dismissed (Mann 2004). The decision to enter war came from a far narrower group that had already formed its mind, not from a complete discussion among the top advisors.

Ultimately, the invasion resulted from a top-heavy strategy wherein military action was seen as the only major answer rather than carefully assessing risks and benefits (Gordon and Trainor 2006). Cheney promoted the worst-case scenario, and Rumsfeld was sure the American military might react quickly and effectively. However, such confidence drove them to ignore long-term legitimacy and postwar stability (Ricks 2006; Daalder and Lindsay 2003). Looking back, how their voices dominated—and how Powell's more cautious approach was discounted—showcases how much leadership dynamics shape foreign policy. It also begs whether the government investigated its alternatives or just carried on with what it always intended to do (Pfiffner 2018)

2. The role of Congress.

The United States Congress approved the Authorisation for Use of Military Action Against Iraq Resolution in October 2002, therefore giving President George W. Bush the right to use military action against Iraq. Reflecting the legislative branch's authority in approving military action

and guiding the country's response to perceived threats in the post-9/11 age, this resolution was a turning point in U.S. foreign policy (U.S. Congress 2002).

- Legislative context and referencing: Transferring reference

Sent initially as House Joint Resolution 114, Congress quickly approved the 2002 Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF). Following House of Representatives acceptance, vote 296–134 on October 10, 2002, the Senate adopted the resolution on October 11 with a 77–23 vote (U.S. Congress 2002). The resolution allowed the President to use any relevant United Nations Security Council decision on Iraq (U.S. Congress 2002) and use the U.S. Armed Forces as judged required to "defend the national security of the United States against the continuous threat posed by Iraq". The parliamentary discussion primarily addressed concerns over Iraq allegedly possessing weapons of mass destruction and transgression of UN resolutions. Later disputed, the Bush government produced evidence demonstrating Iraq's ongoing WMD development and links to terrorist groups (Kerr 2003). Showing an institutional predisposition to back presidential actions during crises, Congress acted quickly to sanction military action despite all the unknowns.

- Tracking Congressional Consensus

Many contend these clauses lacked strict legislative control, even if the Authorisation for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 mandated the President to answer to Congress. The urgency of the post-9/11 context and the way the administration portrayed the Iraqi danger constrained the congressional investigation's range. Some legislators voiced worries about the quick shift towards war and the accuracy of the given information. Senator Robert Byrd suggested changes to the resolution to indicate its expiration date and clarify that it gave the President the power to handle Iraq's danger. These modifications were not enacted, nevertheless (U.S. Congress 2002).

- Political dynamics and biased support between the two parties

The 2002 Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF) revealed interesting political party dynamics via the voting. While most Republicans thought the solution was obvious, Democratic support was more divided. Well-known Democrats such as Joe Biden and then-Senator Hillary Clinton voted in support of stressing the urgency of tackling the alleged threat from Iraq. Still, several Democrats doubted the quality of the information and the rushed path towards war. This bipartisan support might be explained in the post-9/11 political atmosphere, which supported national unity and a fight against being weak on security issues. Moreover, the impending midterm elections force lawmakers to consider how the government views limiting political implications (Marcetic 2019).

- Reflects and Repeals Approved Under Authorisation

Analysing the legitimacy of the evidence supporting the war after the Iraq invasion sparked discussions on the appropriate level of legislative control throughout the authorising process. Critics said Congress had given the executive branch too broad authority, compromising the checks-and-balances system (Anderson 2022). Inspired by this insight, legislators sought to reassess the authorisation to stop using the 2002 AUMF in future military operations, aiming at its annulment (Friends Committee on National Legislation 2023).

Reflecting a growing agreement on the need to reclaim legislative power over war-making decisions, the repeal effort picked up speed in the coming years. Repeal advocates underlined that the 2002 AUMF had completed its initial goals and that its ongoing existence ran the danger of presidential overreach (Meeks and Roy 2025).

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This thesis examines the reasons behind the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 as well as the implications of that choice for US foreign policy at the time. The study aimed to identify the complex combination of factors—some well-known, some less so—that contributed to this shift in global politics. This study examined how American leaders' identities, beliefs, and discourse about their nation influenced their choices. It used a qualitative method grounded in neo-constructivist theory to accomplish this. The administration used the war in Iraq to demonstrate that it saw itself as a world leader with a unique mission, in addition to responding to a threat. The three central tenets of the Bush administration's official case were that Saddam Hussein was associated with terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, that Iraq possessed WMDs, and that the ultimate goal was to advance democracy in the Middle East. These principles were discussed in numerous speeches, official declarations, and news articles, and they were vital in motivating officials and citizens to support the cause. However, this thesis and other research have demonstrated that the claims regarding weapons and connections to terrorists were either untrue or insufficient. At first, the case for democracy appeared compelling, but it became more difficult after the invasion caused chaos and instability. These discrepancies between the stated and actual events imply that the real motivations were more complex and purposeful.

Chapter Four examined several elements contributing to our comprehension of the entire narrative. One relates to the United States' interests in the Middle East, specifically its influence and oil resources. Due to its location and abundance of oil, Iraq plays a significant role in the energy sector. Although Saddam Hussein's Iraq was viewed as a significant issue, the US has long sought to establish control in this region. The United States removed an antagonistic leader and made an effort to install a friendly one. Additionally, it sought to tip the scales in its favour.

Opinions are also significant. The Bush administration's neoconservatives desired a more forceful and aggressive foreign policy. Following 9/11, these voices grew louder. They saw this as a chance to change the world, starting in the Middle East, in a way that emphasised American values such as free markets and democracy. People also thought the United States had the right and duty to lead since it was the last superpower. Thus, the Iraq War was about

more than just Iraq. It was about making a statement about the United States and its implications.

US politics also played a role. After 9/11, people in the United States were outraged and afraid. The Bush administration used that to persuade people to support its actions. Criticising the push for war was difficult because many members of Congress and the media supported it. For those who were still upset about the attacks, the administration's claim that the war was necessary to maintain national security made sense. In this political environment, people who disagreed with one another were frequently disregarded or rejected. This allowed the government to act quickly even in the absence of substantial evidence.

Who had the most power and how decisions were made are covered in Chapter 5. It was clear that the procedure was highly centralised. Most of the decisions were made by a small group of influential individuals, notably President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The influence of foreign intelligence services and their allies was minimal. Although Congress officially approved the war, it did not mention strict oversight or adequate proof. When things go wrong, people worry that the executive branch will have too much power and that democratic oversight will be compromised.

All of these considerations influenced the decision to go to war in Iraq. Domestic politics, objectives, convictions, and history all played a part. The argument cannot be attributed to a single object or individual. Instead, it resulted from a particular time and location, shaped by ambition, fear, and a strong sense of America's place in the world. Those in positions of authority thought the invasion made sense because of their worldview and the US's place in it, not just because of what was happening in Iraq.

Neo-constructivism may help us comprehend how concepts, identities, and narratives impact foreign policy by examining the Iraq War. The Bush administration believed they were protecting freedom and improving the world. That way of thinking influenced people's perceptions of dangers and solutions. In Iraq, the United States could demonstrate its power and values. Even more so than actual threats, this way of thinking highlights how powerful identity and perception can be in global politics.

The US went to war in Iraq in 2003 for a variety of reasons, as this thesis has demonstrated. This decision was made for various reasons, converging at a particular time and place in politics and history. The outcome was more severe, even though the goals may have differed, for example, promoting democracy, ensuring public safety, or changing the area. Many people

were killed and injured in the war, which also caused long-term instability and damaged the American reputation abroad. Iraq is an excellent example of how foreign policy is about more than just strategy and power; it is also about the narratives a country talks about itself and the choices it makes in response to those narratives.

Based on the thesis and research the US's actions in the Iran-Israel conflict show that it is still following the same strategic and ideological paths that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Even though the methods that does not change based on the individuals in charge have changed and indirect engagement is now preferred over direct action, the main goals are still to keep the U.S. in charge of the area, protect allies' interests, and spread American values. The focus on deterrence, security cooperation, and selective pressure shows that many people still believe the U.S. should change the Middle East to meet its own needs. This continuity shows that the stories, ideas, and identity-based demands that led to the Iraq War still shape how people think about foreign policy today.

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