

Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?

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Abstract

The United States' invasion of Iraq and what became known as the Iraq war began on March 19, 2003. President George Bush stated that the purpose of this invasion was to disarm Saddam Hussein of his nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Saddam, who was a product of the United States, went from being an ally to a serious threat. Class system theory best explains why the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. This essay will use a combination of books, articles, documentaries, journals, and an interview to explicate the true intentions of the United States when invading Iraq.

Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?

The gulf region has been at the center of attention for the United States long before the events of September 11th. In a region of so much instability, why did the United States choose to invade Iraq in particular in 2003? The United States government time and time again has stressed the importance of bringing down the ruthless dictator Saddam Hussain. Possible possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) coupled with the fear of radical groups gaining access to those very WMD's became a threat to national security. In 2003, President George Bush used this very reason to rationalize the invasion of Iraq to the American people. On the surface it seemed like logical and necessary to go in and "help" Iraq and protect the American people. Further research on the topic however unveils countless inconsistencies between what the United States said publicly and what they were doing behind closed doors. The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 for no other reason than to further its economic interests regarding oil.

Historical Context

The United States' initial involvement with Iraq goes back much earlier than the invasion of 2003. It all began with the United States' relationship with Saddam Hussein. In 1957 Saddam became affiliated with the Ba'ath party, a party which called for pan-Arabism and socialism (Madhani, 2006). Iraq's leader at the time was a man by the name of Abd al-Karim Qasim. Fear of his communistic ideologies and relationship with the Soviet Union laid the foundation for a relationship between Saddam and the United States. Since America was at the height of its arms race against the Soviets as well as communism during the Cold War, they understandably preferred an anti-communist regime in Iraq. On the other hand, Qasim's vision contradicted with what Saddam and the Ba'ath party envisioned so there was a clear common interest. In 1959, Saddam fled to Damascus to seek refuge after joining a failed attempt to assassinate Qasim

(Madhani, 2006). With Saddam also looking to and willing to take down Qasim, the United States had found the perfect individual to serve their interest. With both sides staring at a common enemy, the relationship between the United States and the soon to be dictator, Saddam Hussein, was born.

With the help of the CIA, Abd al-Karim Qasim was killed in a Ba'ath party coup in 1963. To further suppress communistic influences in Iraq, the CIA provided the Ba'ath party with the names of suspected communists in Iraq. These accused individuals were "Jailed, interrogated, and summarily gunned down" (News Service, 2003). With the old government overthrown, Saddam decided to return to Iraq in 1963 and organized the Ba'ath party's security services (Madhani, 2006). He quickly developed a tough and relentless reputation. Not long after though, the Ba'athists lost power and General Abdul al-Rahman Aref took over as the new leader. Saddam was sentenced to 20 months in prison for plotting against the general but managed to escape and once again made an attempt to seize power. Aref began ratifying new agreements with the Soviet's which was a cause of concern for both the United States and Saddam. (Vasselin, 2005).

Five years later in 1968, the Ba'ath party regained control after a second coup, aided by the CIA to overthrow President Abdul al-Rahman Aref. One of Saddam's relatives, Al-Bakr became President and Saddam became the Vice President (Vasselin, 2005). His rise to power was marked on July 16, 1979 when Hussein became President after forcing al-Bakr to retire (Madhani, 2006). Upon rising to the top, he ordered the killings of 19 of his own party's members in fear that they were conspirators. (Vasselin, 2005). Since the very beginning, Saddam had been a violent leader, yet the United States had no problem overlooking his character as long as he was on the same side, pursuing American interests along with his own.

Amidst Saddam's brutal rise to power, the Iranian revolution was also underway. The Shah had been a U.S ally for so long because he opened up Iran to western influences. Some of these freedoms included allowing practice of any religion and allowing women to vote. His anti-communism stance was also a cause of interest for the United States. The Islamic revolution however was too powerful, and fear of being unable to suppress the movement led to his exile on January 16, 1979. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran to unite the country that same year. Khomeini's rise to power included a great deal of violence and saw a death toll of over 100,000 lives. Those in his opposition were tortured and slaughtered without any form of trial. The revolution was so violent, it was reported that, "More Iranians were killed during Khomeini's first month in power than in the Shah's 37-year reign" (Perloff, 2009). Furthermore, Khomeini strongly disapproved Saddam and condemned him for his brutality as a leader and his oppression of the Shia population in Iraq (Vasselin, 2005). Fear of the revolution and an attack from Iran prompted Saddam to consider war. He saw that Iran was vulnerable during the revolution, so he decided to go to war.

Around the same time, it is important to note that the United States was facing an energy crisis. Domestic oil consumption and domestic oil production were becoming increasingly inversely related and ultimately forced America to become more dependent on importing oil from foreign sources, notably the Middle East (Energy Crisis (1970s), 2010). The Iranian Revolution caused a drop of crude oil production by 3.9 million barrels per day from 1978 to 1981. The world supply of oil seemed to be rapidly shrinking and the U.S Energy Information Administration reported that, "In 1980, the Iran-Iraq War began, and many Persian Gulf countries reduced output as well. OPEC crude oil prices increased to unprecedented levels between 1979 and 1981. By 1981, OPEC production declined to 22.8 million barrels per day, 7.0

million barrels per day below its level for 1978” (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2002). High amounts of oil flowing out at a reasonable price was vital for a successful United States economy. Now that America was becoming very dependent on imported oil, there was a clear interest for stability in the Persian Gulf.

Since The United States could not afford the instability in Iran to spread to Iraq, it was imperative for them to ensure Iraq came out victorious. President Reagan even wrote a note in the margin of a report regarding the war, addressed to Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci saying, "An Iranian victory is unacceptable" (Harris, 2013). Just like in his rise to power, the United States and Saddam found a common enemy. Although the United States did not directly fight alongside Iraq, they did everything in their power to make sure Iraq won. Former Reagan official and National Security Council staffer Howard Teicher claimed the United States, "Actively supported the Iraqi war effort by supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars of credits, by providing US military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis, and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure Iraq had the military weaponry required.” (Nimmo, 2002). The United States supported Iraq so much so that they knowingly and willingly armed them with the very WMD’s they would use as a reason to invade Iraq in 2003. The United States has constantly denied any involvement with Saddam’s use of these weapons but it is clear that they were lying. Rick Francona, a retired Air Force Colonel said, "The Iraqis never told us that they intended to use nerve gas. They didn't have to. We already knew" (Harris, 2013). With the help of the United States, the war concluded in 1988 with an Iraqi victory and 750,000 Iranian casualties (Kurzman, 2013).

This war led to a formal restoring of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq. In 1982, the United States State Department removed Iraq from its list of “state sponsors of

terrorism” even though they were well aware of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons. The United States was the only country to vote against condemning Iraq in a 1986 UN Security Council Statement for their use of mustard gas in the war (Research Unit for Political Economy, 2002). The ties between the United States economic interests and Iraq are slowly becoming clearer. The United States is struggling at home with an energy crisis, desperately in need of more international oil. The Ba’athist regime which the United States put in power in Iraq is being threatened by an unstable Iran. If Iran was to win this war, the United States would have lost control over oil rich Iraq and foreseeably other oil rich nations in the area as well. The only reason the United States went to such extremes to help Iraq win was to make sure they would have some influence in a region they depended on so much for energy.

Although Saddam was victorious in the Iran-Iraq war, eight years of fighting left Iraq’s economy depleted. They were in debt to the numerous countries who helped finance the war and damaged infrastructure made it difficult to profit from their most valuable asset: oil. Kuwait demanded around 30 billion dollars, which was nearly impossible for Saddam to repay at the current state of his country (Humphreys, 2005). Kuwait simultaneously began overproducing oil, flooding the global supply and ultimately driving the prices down (Vasselin, 2005). Iraq lost a billion dollars every time the price of oil fell by a dollar (Ibrahim, 1990). With damaged economic infrastructure and inability to repay or negotiate with Kuwait, Saddam felt justified to attack Kuwait in 1990 (Vasselin, 2005).

The United States had warned Iraq against taking military action against Kuwait but Saddam ignored. On August 2nd 1990 he invaded with 100,000 troops to annex Kuwait. There was international agreement in condemning the invasion. After refusing to withdraw, the U.S.

launched Operation Desert Storm, leading a coalition to combat Iraq on January 16, 1991. The United States Security Council also embargoed and sanctioned Iraq (The Historian, 2013).

In just twenty-four hours, the coalition had successfully defeated Iraq and on March 2nd the United Nations Security Council called for a cease-fire. Iraq was responsible for paying reparations for all the damage they had caused. The United Nations also passed Security Council Resolution 687 which established the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) to inspect and strip Iraq of its chemical and biological weapons (The Historian, 2013).

These sanctions were in large part an attempt to dispose of Saddam Hussain and his regime. The United States hoped the suffering Iraqi people would rebel and take down Saddam. Unfortunately, the Saddam suppressed revolts and kept a firm grip on his power while his people continued to suffer. Sanctions destroyed Iraq's infrastructure which resulted in devastating casualties of Iraqi civilians. Failure to supply the Iraqi people with basic needs such as clean water, sanitation and electricity lead to a death toll of 1.2 million people according to a 1997 UNICEF report (Unit for Political Economy, 2003).

In his ultimatum to Saddam, President Bush claimed that Iraq was not cooperating in the disarmament of WMD's and said, "The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other." When Saddam refused to cooperate with the disarmament of Iraq, the United States gave him and his regime forty-eight hours to leave the country. Upon his refusal, the United States invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003 (Garamone, 2003). Although The U.S. captured Saddam, the war was a bloody one. Over 3,000 Americans lost their lives and 23,000 were wounded in the first four

years alone. Iraqi civilians suffered the most as over 50,000 were killed (Bush announces the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2004).

Theoretical Prospective

The theory that best describes the reason for invading Iraq in 2003 is the class system theory. This theory says that states are essentially run by the elite wealthy class who have the goal of accumulating vast amounts of wealth. In the book *Conflict and cooperation: evolving theories of international relations*, Genest divides states into three categories, “Core (wealthy), periphery (poor), and semi-periphery (less developed).” He says that, “Core nations are wealthy, advanced powers that control the global means of production and use their wealth and power to exploit and dominate those states residing in the semi-periphery and periphery of the global economics system” (Genest, 2004). Major actors in this theory are the states, multinational corporations, and international organizations.

Just like the first Persian Gulf War, intervention by the United States was largely to pursue the interests of the wealthy and powerful. Interest in oil from the Middle East has been on the United States’ agenda long before 2003. President Jimmy Carter back in 1980 said, “Let opposition be absolutely clear, an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interest of the United States of America.” The United States befriended Saddam early on to defeat Iran but he became a threat as soon he invaded Kuwait, a country rich in oil. Upon Saddam’s attack on Kuwait, U.S. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney openly stated, “Iraq controlled 10 percent of the world’s reserves prior to the invasion of Kuwait. Once Saddam Hussein took Kuwait, he doubled that to approximately twenty percent of the world’s known oil reserves and that gave him a stranglehold on our economy and that of most of the other nations of the world as well” (Maddow, 2013). He

explicitly linked the implications the United States economy would face upon Saddam's increase control of oil. The United States stood by Iraq for so long, but as soon as he threatened oil, he became the enemy.

Now that Saddam served no purpose but rather imposed an economic threat, he had to be removed. All that was left to do was convince the American people. Prior to the first Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush casted Saddam as a ruthless leader in front of the public eye with phrases like, "We're dealing with Hitler revisited" (Maddow, 2013). These kinds of phrases were meant to trick the greater population and get them to agree to take down Saddam. Of course there were no public comments regarding the extent to which the United States armed this "Hitler" with WMD's and stood by his side as he slaughtered countless civilians during the Iran-Iraq war. There was no mention of oil and the United States effectively convinced the public that they were "protecting world peace".

The United States pushed for sanctions on Iraq after the Gulf war to reprimand and weaken Saddam; they also wanted to prevent other nations from gaining control of the oil. Iraq was known for having vast amounts of oil, only second to Saudi Arabia, where the United States already had influence (Maddow, 2013). The sanctions were benefiting the United States because it prevented foreign investments and trade with Iraq. Everyone including Iraq could not benefit from the valuable oil; it was basically just sitting there. Iraq had fifty-five undeveloped oil fields out of seventy and was producing only three million barrels a day. The imposed sanctions made it difficult to increase that production. It is reported that there were nearly 2000 contracts on hold on oil field development worth about five billion dollars. Eighty percent of those contracts were held by the United States. The total value of foreign contracts for drilling was valued at almost 1.1 trillion dollars (Research Unit for Political Economy). There was so much wealth to be

gained from Iraq, the United States just needed a reason to go and get it. Just like they did in the first Persian Gulf War, they needed to trick the public to gain approval.

It is no surprise then that Bush began planning to invade Iraq long before the events of September 11th. Within 11 days of entering the Whitehouse, Bush assembled his national security team. His team consisted of Vice President Dick Cheney, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill (Maddow, 2013). This team had a clear connection to the oil business. President Bush was a chief executive of a Texas based Oil Company prior to assuming the presidency. In 2000, Bush had eleven years of experience in the oil business compared to only six months in government. Condoleezza Rice was on the board of directors of Chevron for ten years compared to just three years in government. Cheney spent five years as the CEO of Halliburton, the world's largest oil company. Lockheed Martin also played a big role as they had sixteen executives who have served in the George Bush Administration (Juhasz, 2006).

In their very first meeting they discussed Iraq, and Sectary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, "Imagine, imagine if Iraq was essentially a client state of the United States. Imagine how that would look, if they were a friendly state, if we had primacy and access and maybe control of their oil fields." Eight months prior to the attack of September 11th the Bush administration was already planning to go in and secure the oil. Despite numerous explicit intentions about the securing oil, the government publicly continued to talk about how dangerous Saddam was and how his WMD's could fall in the hands of terrorists groups like Al Qaida. In an interview, Donald Rumsfeld was pressed about the role oil played in this invasion and he blatantly contradicted his remarks in the National Security meetings when he said, "It has nothing to do with oil -- literally nothing to do with oil" (Maddow, 2013).

The attack of September 11th was one of the most devastating attacks on American soil. It brought fear among the citizens of America and created a united stance against terrorism. This was the first time the public saw and felt the instability in the Middle East as an immediate threat. Citizens could not fathom the thought of these terrorists getting a hold of WMD's. This is exactly what the United States government needed: a distraction. Although there were concerns about WMD's, the real focus was on oil. The government rode this threat of WMD's to push their hidden agenda regarding oil. Sure 9/11 was horrific, but at the same time it was just what the United States government was waiting for. They had their "reason" to go to Iraq.

Class system theory recognizes multinational corporations as a major actor and this war represents a clear connection between the multinational corporations and their influence on the state. Halliburton, the largest oil company benefited greatly from this war along with its former CEO, the Vice President himself. Dick Cheney pushed for war and as result, Halliburton received U.S. government contracts in Iraq worth nearly \$11 billion. Halliburton stocks tripled since the Iraq invasion and Vice President Dich Cheney of course was a stockholder (Juhasz, 2006).

Another multinational corporation involved in this conflict was Lockheed Martin. During his time at Lockheed Martin, and executive named Bruce Jackson was responsible for writing the Republican foreign policy platform. When corporations are practically developing the foreign policy, they are essentially in control of the government. Then in 2002, Bruce Jackson cofounded the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq which lobbied to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Overthrowing Saddam did not "save" the United States from some immediate threat. Instead, it tripled Lockheed Martin's stocks and increased sales contracts by \$11 billion. They also received

contracts from the Air Force worth over \$5.6 million. The two years after the invasion, Chevron also benefited as they recorded their most profitable years in company history (Juhaz, 2006).

It is no secret that the United States practically runs on oil. This research shows that the United States without a doubt considered and benefited from Iraq's oil. Why then did the government lie about it? In an interview with retired SEAL Derrick F. Van Orden about why the United States really invaded Iraq, his thoughts were consistent with the research and conclusion of this paper. He said, "I have no issues saying we should go to war about oil. Personally I believe we should have said we were going to war for oil, but that was not the case...I read the same intelligence stuff the President of the United States did and I encourage you to put in your paper, there should be more truthfulness in reasoning..."(Van Orden, Personal Communication October 18, 2014).

The United States invaded Iraq to ensure economic stability by maintaining the flow of oil through the Middle East and to the United States. Class system is the best theory to explain this war because it shows the clear link between business and how it controls government. Individuals like Bush, Cheney, and Rice were primarily in business before they gained positions of power. When they gained power, they used it to further accumulate wealth. This sort of greed ties in perfectly with class systems view on human nature: humans are selfish. As long as the wealthy are in power, the United States will continue to cater its policies to the elite and ensure their economic success. Although this will not change, perhaps the government can be more truthful in its intentions in the future.

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