Preemptive Strike: Justifying the Second Iraq War

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Abstract

This essay briefly discusses some of the factors that influenced decisions made by the Bush administration regarding the preemptive strike and the subsequent ongoing war in Iraq. US Foreign policy concerning Iraq and some of the justifications for the US led invasion in 2003 will be discussed, as well as some outcomes of the war. Finally, some similarities between the Iraq and Vietnam wars (mid to late 1960s) will be covered.

要　　約

この小論では、イラクに対する先制攻撃とその後のイラクでの戦争に関してブッシュ政権が下した結論に影響を及ぼしたいくつかの要因について言及している。イラクに対する外交政策及び、アメリカがイラクに侵攻した正当性、そして戦争の結果について検討した。論考の最後にはイラク戦争とベトナム戦争の類似性も明らかにしている。

1. Introduction

Post 9/11, the United States was attempting to come to terms with the 'new world' (Powell cited in Crawford 2003), and prevent similar terrorist attacks in the future. Consequently, US foreign policy was strengthened to reflect the changes in global security and to combat the threat of terrorism (Cheney 2001, cited in Crawford 2003). The strategies and policies pursued however, such as regime change, claims about Hussein's WMD arsenal, and supposed links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, were ambiguous, misleading and in some cases, fabricated (Yglesias, cited in Kazin 2008). The preemptive war and regime change in Iraq drew condemnation at home and abroad, as well as heightened claims that America was not acting in the interests of securing freedom from tyranny, oppression and liberty for Iraq. As noted by Walzer, Iraq is the only entity capable of facilitating the establishment of a new mode of governance and bringing about lasting peace, freedom and liberty (2004).

The Bush administration's decisions, states Kagan, are shaped by the principle of "maintaining their predominant influence in regions that matter to it, and excluding the influence of other great powers (2008)." Its justification for its Iraq campaign and continuous rhetoric about preserving freedom, justice and liberty, the exaggeration of WMD threats, and apparent ignorance toward lessons learnt from chaos that accompanied the Vietnam War will be briefly discussed. There have been some positive outcomes of the Iraq War, although they mostly pertain to financial growth and factors regarding lifestyle betterment, and access to modern commodities taken for granted in the West (O'Hanlon 2010). Profits, GDP and lifestyle surveys aside, the loss of civilian and military life combined with the increased fragmentation of Iraqi society has rendered any gains fruitless. Operation Iraqi Freedom has served to instil insecurity and oppression amongst the people of Iraq (Chernus

2006). Moreover, the US is now more likely to have to contend with heightened tensions and possible threats from other states or terrorist organizations not approving of its thrust to Westernize and establish democracy in the Middle East. Although the US strategy for victory in Iraq in its current manifestation appears to failing, it could bear fruit and lead to stability in the Middle East, as predicted by the Bush administration. In reference to Niebuhr however, I agree that once again the "recalcitrant forces" in history appear to be haunting American foreign policy (cited in Bacevich 2009).

2. The Masterminds

First of all, it is important to rewind history to the post-Cold War period, as this was arguably when the effects of liberal US foreign policy began to lay the foundation for the global security threats to be experienced throughout the 1990s, culminating in the terror attacks of 9/11. Smith ascertains that "the strengthening and the new offensive outlook of US foreign policy actually took place in November 9 1989, the date commemorating the fall of the Berlin Wall, not September 11 2001" (2009). The liberal internationalists influencing US foreign policy at this time were focusing on gaining consensus for policies that would support the US role as hegemon and its ability to spread democracy and freedom (Ikenberry 2009). The "Democratic Peace Theory" was widely accepted therefore, spreading democracy would reduce conflict and increase capitalism, liberty and freedom. This US policy of spreading peace, democracy and liberty is evident in the policies of many former presidents right back to its champion Wilson, hence the tag, "Wilsonianism" (Ikenberry 2009). According to Zakaira however, "the democratic peace theory is actually the liberal peace theory. The democratic peace theory is real, but it has little to do with democracy" (2007). Former Secretary of State Albright of the Clinton administration sums up the attitude of the US administration: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall, and we see further than other countries into the future" (Albright 1998, in Smith 2009).

Bush is said to be 'beating a well-worn path', and that will continue with the following US administrations (Kagan 2008). Ikenberry however, wrote "in the instance of the Bush administration, it advanced the liberal actions and strategy of previous administrations to the extent of displaying a 'new logic of global order'" (2009). The differences between traditional Wilsonian vision and Bush's take on it were summed up by Jervis: "Bush wanted to make the world democratic so that the US would be safe, rather than Wilson's vision of making the world a safe place for democracy" (cited in Ikenberry 2009). According to Bacevich, "Bush has not turned his back on long established policy ideals; he has actually returned to them" (cited in Kazin 2008). As briefly illustrated above, US foreign policy for the last century has been characterized by the desire to spread democracy and Western liberal values. This notion of expansion and hegemonic control illustrates historical links and consistencies in US foreign policy.

The catalyst of 9/11 and the dissatisfaction with liberal policies allowed a morphing of political thought, resulting in the "Bush Doctrine". Smith claims however, "the policies underpinning the Bush Doctrine were actually formulated by neoliberals" (Smith 2009). Mearsheimer calls the 'Bush Doctrine' "Wilsonianism with teeth" (2005). Although Bush is often seen as or perceived to be a driving force or one of the masterminds of 'Bush Doctrine', others in the White House such as the neoconservatives shaped its ideals and theories prior to

his tenure as president.

3. From Clinton to Bush

The neoconservative direction taken by Bush and co. differs from Clinton's containment policies and neoliberal belief in multilateral action. The Clinton administration was positive and assertive in its policies and staunch in the defense of America's interests however, it was characterized by a belief founded more in the projection of 'soft power' and diplomacy where suitable, and the acceptance of co-operation and power sharing in multilateral bodies such as NATO or the UN. In agreement, Yglesias suggests, "US power is most effectively used when applied to enforce international law" (cited in Kazin 2008). Change was also evident in the terminology used by Bush and Clinton to describe threats: Clinton used less aggressive terminology, whereas Bush most commonly referred to Iraq, North Korea and Iran as the 'axis of evil'. The White House, according to Chernus, was able to garner public support and consent through simplistic slogans such as 'They hate our freedoms' and 'They're flat evil' (2006). Interestingly, the "evil empire" was Reagan's phrase of choice, in relation to the USSR (Knock 2009).

Clinton's tenure in the post-Cold War era was by coincidence punctuated by public perceptions that threats from abroad had ceased to exist. Thus, consent for aggressive action or foreign policy would have been difficult to secure. (Pauly & Lansford 2005). The spread of peace and democracy seemed to now be unrestricted, which resulted in the famed liberal writer Fukuyama claiming it was "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1989, cited in Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2008). Such optimism, indecision and uncertainty about how to wield such power and conduct international relations suggested, "America was a superpower without a mission" (Cox in Baylis, Smith & Owens 2008). Those dissatisfied with Clinton's liberal policies, such as the *Project for the New American Century* (PNAC) members, wrote to Clinton in 1998 to voice concerns such as regime change in Iraq, Hussein's WMDs and securing US interests in the Middle East (PNAC 1998). They would later get their wish in a willing and seemingly more ideological and crusading President Bush (Yordan 2006).

When Bush first took office however, he was not so interested in changing foreign policy. Former Deputy Secretary of State Armitage noted that there was a clear and visible similarity between the policies of Clinton and Bush in the initial stages of Bush's presidency (cited in Moens 2004). Bush was quoted as saying, "Keep them (terrorists) isolated in the world of public opinion and work with our alliances to keep them isolated" (Halper & Clarke 2004). This leads to the assumption that Clinton's neoliberal policies were actually effective, even with their lack of aggressive power politics as Realists and Neoconservatives had demanded. The events of September 11 2001 however, ushered in a new era of offensive foreign policy and hard power projection.

"Under the impact of 9/11, and the seductive arguments made by the neoconservatives that unilateral action alone was called for, many liberal internationalists joined Bush's war party" (Smith 2009). One must question the right of a state to exert its influence in such self-righteous ways though, especially considering the internationally recognised norms of sovereignty and the right to self-govern, whether it is a Marxist dictatorship or a liberal democracy. Furthermore, the contradictory nature of the policies of the Bush administration did not appear to respect the freedom and liberty of other states, nor do they respect international conventions and rulings such as those stipulated by the United Nations Security Council. All evidence suggests that in some

respects, the US as a hegemon or colonial power, as were other great powers or dynasties throughout history, somewhat disinterested in and disrespectful of the peoples and cultures that it encroaches upon.

Bush became a war president as a result of 9/11, and his approval with voters hit 92% in October 2001 (Moens 2004). Bush asserted in his September 23 2001 address to Congress, "Whether we bring justice to our enemies, or our enemies to justice, justice will be done" (cited in Moens 2004). Once again such a self-righteous display by the US administration highlights the belief in itself as the saviour of the free world and a global policeman. According to Realist theory, the state is the absolute authority and protector of its own security. Some realists would not completely support this war however, as it undermines America's position of power and this endeavour is arguably not in America's best interests. The liberal notion of spreading peace through democracy and freedom was common rhetoric throughout Bush's presidency. Former Secretary of State Rice said, "A new balance of power that favoured freedom would be experienced post 9/11" (cited in Chernus 2006). In true realist form, Kagan stated "Liberal order does not rest on ideas and institutions alone. It is shaped by configurations of power" (2008).

4. Justification for Regime Change in Iraq

Bush signaled his intentions for regime change in Iraq, often citing WMD, freedom for Iraqi people, the need to implement security in the Middle East, and reducing the threats of terror manifesting there (2003). According to Walzer, brutality, inhumanity and murder were part and parcel of Saddam's rule (2004). Hussein was also "guilty of past crimes and inhumanities" (Walzer 2006). Furthermore, there is the belief that Iraq's crimes against humanity and indiscretions had long provided ample grounds and justification for US intervention (Nichols 2003). The fear of an irrational Hussein deploying WMD was the main justification for striking Iraq. Hussein's cat-and-mouse game with UN weapons inspectors eventually wore thin on the Americans. Wolfowitz was quoted as saying "for bureaucratic reasons we settled on the issue of WMD, because it was the one reason everyone would agree upon" (cited in Hapler & Clarke 2004). Krauthammer (in Rosen 2005) said, "After 9/11, we don't have the luxury of time." But according to Byers (2003), "no rational government would attack the US." In fact, since 1992, America's defense budget has accounted for approximately 40% of total global spending on defense and weapons technology (Cox 2002). Knock asserts though, that "once there proved to be no WMDs in Iraq, the administration 'flip-flopped' and began to emphasize a different rationalization for the war-that its purpose was to bring democracy to the Middle East" (2009). Belief in the WMD threat, though, was so prevalent that it could not really have been classed a misconception; even the intelligence community believed it (Kull, Ramsay & Lewis 2002). The switching between reasons, excuses and possible threats tends to be confusing, contradictory and at odds with the actual evidence used to justify war.

5. Altering the Status Quo: Iran's Gains

Stoessinger believes that "containment of Iraq was working and invasion was not necessary, as the sanctions in place and pressure being applied to Hussein just prior to the outbreak of war was actually producing positive results" (2008). The invasion of Iraq has altered the status quo in Iraq, and now the US has to deal with increased sectarian violence, a splintered society that was once relatively subdued due to Hussein's control and

the Ba'ath party, and the stability or civil order maintained by the Iraqi Army and police force. Walzer said that "the containment of Iraq was both successful and unsuccessful; it prevented weapons development and mass murder, but it did not stop the war" (2006). Crawford summarizes the situation well, stating that "preventive wars short-circuit non-military means of solving problems" (2003). Once the Hussein dictatorship had been subdued, the balance of power in the Middle East was altered, and as a result Iran has become more vocal and provocative. Iran could also be suffering symptoms of the 'security dilemma': The US military presence close to Iran would understandably cause them to increase their military power to balance the threat posed. Perhaps this is why Iran is now more actively pursuing nuclear technology. Once again, the status quo has been altered, as Iraq was useful in keeping Iran 'in check'. Another side effect of Iran's increase in confidence and position is its ability to cause concern with Israel, which itself now is responding to Iran's rhetoric and defiance. It is also worth considering the relative gains made by Iran. By default, they have advanced their position in the Middle East and arguably gained more credibility in the international scene through its defiance of the West, Israel and the US. Iran's gains would be another reason why some realists would not approve of the conduct of the Iraq war. Iran's rise and somewhat questionable trading practices, especially in relation to weapons purchasing from China, has acted to further undermine America's position in the Middle East and quite possibly have created another potential flashpoint for the future.

6. Post "War" Criticisms of US Policy

Severe criticism has also arisen from handling and management of Iraq in the post-war period. There was "a clear lack of policy, direction and concern for the post-war rebuilding and stabilising stages" (Zakaira 2007). A striking example of poor vision and failure to understand the centres of power and politics in Iraq was the disbanding of the Iraqi army. This resulted in high unemployment, a surplus of young, fit and able men with little prospects, who as a result often turned to fundamentalism or terrorism as a means of securing an income and directing their anger towards the US. Further condemnation abounds, such as Dobbins' comment, "The U.S. mission in Iraq lacks legitimacy and credibility and unless its role is changed, it will continue to inspire local resistance, radicalize neighboring populations, and discourage international cooperation" (2005). Kolodziej believes, "The US, like other empires, will fail because its reach was beyond its grasp" (2006). One fear is as the US decreases troop levels and withdraws, the radical and fundamental elements will further entrench and establish themselves and fill the vacuum left by the defunct Iraqi military and police force. As a result, Iraq would then truly become a fragmented state and the breeding ground for terrorists that it was heralded to be by the Bush administration. In contrast though, Kagan asserts, "It is optimistic to imagine that a diminished American position in the Middle East would lead to greater stability" (2008). Thus, although there has been overwhelming outcry at the 'illegal' invasion of Iraq by America and its 'Coalition', there are still parties that insist on the credibility and good intentions of the US and its Iraq policies. Just as in Vietnam, those who doubted or rebuked the US administration and its foreign policies were painted as unpatriotic, un-American or irresponsible citizens who have neglected America's duty to protect the freedoms of those unable to protect themselves. (Chernus 2006)

7. Recalcitrant Forces

There are arguably many parallels between the Vietnam War and the current Iraq War such as the public outcry in the US over sending American forces to far-off places to fight unpopular wars against an enemy that had apparently caused no harm to the US. Other 'recalcitrant forces' evident in the Iraq and Vietnam wars to be briefly discussed here are: The failure to understand the politics and history of other states, indiscriminate combat tactics and lack of empathy for civilians, and misleading the public about causes and justifications for war.

The US failed to see the connection between its military presence in the Middle East and foreign policies to the attacks by al-Qaeda (Zakaira 2007). Similarly, increased US support and intervention in South Vietnam in some ways forced Ho Chi Minh to seek further assistance from his communist allies in Russia and China (Knight 2004). Consideration of Iraq's desire or lack of regarding the push to democratize and liberalize was not factored into policy. Although Western states are arguably more open to and familiar with liberal notions of capitalism, democracy and certain civil freedoms or liberties, states such as Iraq are not. Kagan states that non-liberals such as Iraq see Western ideals as oppression, not freedom (2008). The promise of freedom, liberty and increased wealth or prosperity through democratization has materialized in Iraq, as it did in Vietnam, though the masses often miss out as the wealth is retained by elites, corrupt officials, and government personnel (Moyar 2006). If anything, the surge in black market activity coinciding with both wars led to inflated prices and further crime and corruption (Steibel 1972; Krepinevich 2005)

The ongoing chaos in Iraq resulting from poor management policies and at times indiscriminate combat tactics has swelled the ranks of insurgents, as in Vietnam. Civilian casualties, brutal treatment of and insensitive handling of non-combatants, and atrocities such as the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal have undermined America's already tainted reputation in the eyes of Iraqis (Ignatius in Brzezinski & Scowcroft 2008). Similarly, incidents such as the My Lai massacre, 'Agent Orange' use, and sexual assault or rape committed by US forces during the Vietnam War illustrated a lack of care for those whose freedom was apparently being fought for (Lewy 1978). Unfortunately for the US, it is widely perceived as just the latest western power to colonize the Arab world (Zakaira 2007). Likewise, the US misunderstood Ho Chi Minh's ambitions to rid Vietnam of colonial invaders, and as a consequence, America eventually replaced France as the new colonial master (Stoessinger 2008). Instead of America bringing freedom to Vietnamese oppressed by Communism, it is now bringing freedom from Islamic fundamentalism for Iraqis.

The phrase "winning hearts and minds" characterised both wars and it is not uncommon to see images from Iraq or Vietnam of US military personnel providing medical care, playing with children or throwing treats from atop of armoured vehicles. Much more understanding and effort however, is required by America than the Iraqi insurgents to attain victory (Krepinevich 2005). In Iraq as was the case in Vietnam, local support faded as the civilian population witnessed the transient and temporary nature of US securitization tactics for towns, villages or hamlets (Lewy 1978; Brzezinski & Scowcroft 2008). Thus US tactics often served to galvanize enemy support amongst civilian populations that were initially sympathetic to the US cause. Walt claims "being an international relations scholar is neither necessary nor sufficient for appointment to the NSC or other similar bodies" (2005). Perhaps herein lies one reason why Niebuhr's 'recalcitrant forces' are persistent.

Ambiguous and false intelligence reports about Iraq's claimed WMD arsenal were constantly reported on

to garner support from Congress and the general public. Also, the media constantly spread insecurity and fear of Iraq and the Middle East to maintain support for the war and basically render any chance of a peaceful resolution to the crisis unattainable (Chernus 2006). The long held fear in America and the West in the 50s and 60s of the "domino effect" - countries falling to communism in Asia, resembles the Bush administration's propaganda about anti-US forces linking up in Iraq and training for terrorist activities against the freedom-loving Western world (Bacevich 2009). Ironically, it was men such as Rumsfeld and the CIA who actually provided Iraq with a means to obtain such weaponry and intelligence and training during the Iran-Iraq War period (Bacevich 2009). The US government also claimed North Vietnamese attacks on naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964 as justification for declaring war (Lewy 1978). There was confusion over whether the North actually fired upon the US Navy vessel the Maddox, but nonetheless the information relayed was used to justify reprisals and eventually escalation into all out war (Stoessinger 2008). Both claims about Iraq's WMD stockpiles and North Vietnam's attack on the US in the Gulf of Tonkin were later proven to be inaccurate, inflated and untrue. Walzer asserts that America needs to consider its role in conflicts when there is doubt surrounding the legality or morality of any military action (2004). Furthermore, great care needs to be taken to not turn local populations against American forces, as their support is a key requirement for victory (Walzer 2004).

8. Conclusion

We are now fortunate enough to have the hindsight and revelations that history provides. Although it is often argued that the US is wrong for its actions against Iraq, the masterminds acted in what were arguably the best interests of the US, at least in accordance with their own visions for where America needed to be for short-term security guarantees and longer term stability and democracy in the Middle East. US aims for peace in the Middle East are an arguably true intention. However, doubts over the credibility and the justification for war still remain, and the US should have been more transparent about Hussein's WMD arsenal and capabilities. The negative outcomes could have been avoided somewhat if the US had paid attention to lessons learnt from other conflicts such as in Vietnam. The US administration failed in their handling of the war and lack of direction and vision, the exaggeration of the Hussein's WMD threat, and the wish to spread democracy, capitalism and liberalism in a state or region that was not accepting of it. Arguably, the main failure was to not completely exhaust political means for resolving conflict before use of military power. In the words of Otto von Bismark, "Preventive wars are suicide for fear of death" (cited in Jervis 2003).

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