



Research Report

(HSC)

(Addressing the Iraq war (2003-2004))

(Kira Tarasova)

(Head Chair)

Introduction

On the 20th of March 2003, the United States-led coalition invaded the Republic of Iraq. What was planned to be a short operation to eliminate the geopolitical threat of Iraq's dictator at the time Hassam Hussein, turned into an eight-year war ending only in 2011. The conflict merged Iraq into chaos, insecurity and uncertainty. It also sparked the rapid rise of insurgency and terrorist organisations in the region which held long-term effects globally. The Iraq war also became the reason for emerging the greatest global threat the world has seen - ISIS. The war, its background and aftermath can be studied to see how failed states transpire and how can the nation be healed from the long term conflict impacting each and every person on Iraq. But why was Iraq invaded in the first place? Was the US justified in its actions? And what was the aftermath of the conflict for Iraq, the Middle East and the world as a whole?

Definitions of Key Terms

Insurgency:

An organised violent movement aimed at overthrowing the current government for political aims. Typically used tactics are guerilla warfare and terrorism.

Panarabism:

Political philosophy aimed at uniting all Arab states under a single government promoting solidarity in culture, language and religion. The theory was created by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and later picked up by dictators like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi.

Sectarian Violence:

Acts of violence between different ethnic or religious groups within a society, often driven by political tensions. Fearing each other's identity groups aim to gain more resources over over groups through violent means.

General overview

The background that led to the Invasion of Iraq:

On the 11th of September 2001, a terrorist attack carried out by Al-Qaeda hijacked 4 commercial planes and ended in the deaths of 2,996 people. This attack sparked global panic about the next terrorist attack and led to the government of the United States of America declaring “war on terror”. As a part of this defence strategy, the States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and carried out special Military Operations in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Philippines, Nigeria, Niger and Mali. In the war against the potential threat of terrorism, the United States military took an estimated 4.7 million civilians' lives globally. In the counterterrorism operation, George W Bush, the president of the US at the time, feared that Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein would sponsor the next terrorist attack against the US with chemical weapons and declared war against him and his government of the Republic of Iraq. It is important to note, that Al-Qaeda had no relation to Iraq and was an organisation based solely in Afghanistan that was at the time under the control of another radical Islamic group Taliban. But why did the American government suspect Iraq’s Saddam Hussein of aiding the terrorists?

Today, Iraq is the 5th biggest world exporter of oil, a strategic place with high natural resources. In 1925 though, the English company Iraq Petroleum was the monopoly in the country producing and exporting the country’s most important resource to its European owners. England though did not take any responsibility for the inner control of the country due to the high probability of the civil war at the time. Iraq was created from previously three regions of the Ottoman Empire each with distinct demographics all with yearning for power and independence - Kurds, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shias. On the 3rd of October 1932, The United Kingdom granted independence to the Kingdom of Iraq. However, the previous colonial power still remained in control of Iraq’s rich oil industry and foreign affairs essentially making the country an autonomous region left to battle insurgencies and national-level issues. In 1968 as a result of a military coup, Saddam Hussein, a leader of the Ba’ath party came to rule Iraq. His main political agenda was weakening the country’s reliance on foreign powers. Consequently, in 1972, Iraq Petroleum was nationalised with the profits from oil finally going into the country rather than being exported directly.

As mentioned above, Saddam Hussein and the Ba’ath Party were rooted in an authoritarian regime establishing oppressive norms to maintain power over the diverse ethnic

landscape of Iraq. To suppress dissent and eliminate opposition Hussein ruled through cruel tyranny implementing extreme measures usually oppressing his own people. With countless violations of human rights, Hussein consolidated power around him into a personalist dictatorship. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, Hussein's government deployed chemical and biological weapons against the Iranian military and civilians. Furthermore, the use of such internationally forbidden weaponry was cast upon the Kurdish population of Iraq in what is now commonly referred to as the Kurdish genocide. In 1988 Hussein launched a political campaign against Kurds in Iraq employing poisonous gas. For example, the massacre in Halabja where Hussein used a targeted chemical attack which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Kurdish civilians. This political regime led to the international condemnation of Saddam Hussein with the specifically high interest of George W Bush and heightened tensions with the United States.

Another leading factor in the Iraq war was the first Gulf War. In 1990 Hussein's military invaded the neighbouring State of Kuwait. With a harsh ruling style and as mentioned above big oil reserves, Saddam Hussein had big geopolitical ambitions in the region. Hussein was a believer in Pan-Arabism theory and sought the unification of Arab people into a single state. Also, combining Iraq's oil with Kuwait's Hussein would have 20% of all global oil reserves. However, he also planned to invade Saudi Arabia with whose oil Hussein would have control of now 45% of all global supply. Having the 5th biggest army in the world, the operation seemed like an easy economic and political gain for Iraq. However, a coalition of 43 states led by the United States quickly pushed Iraq back into its borders and occupied a part of the country.

The recently started American War in Afghanistan against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as a part of the war on terror showed great success in the years leading up to 2003. "Freeing" Afghanistan into a democracy, George W Bush was blinded by the quick triumph which led him to believe a possibility of quick military intervention into Iraq. Adding to it, the American president had a close personal relationship with Great Britain's prime minister at the time, Tony Blair. Blair vouched to support the US militarily in case of intervention in Iraq which gave Bush additional confidence in the necessity of the operation. With the absence of a legal case against Iraq, the government of the United States had proposed "the discernment of weapons of mass destruction" in the possession of Saddam Hussein. The UK government wanted to follow a bureaucratic route through the United Nations instead of direct military intervention.

On November 8th 2002, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed Resolution 1441 condemning and forcing Iraq's government to give up Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Saddam Hussein led International observers to enter Iraq to complete an investigation into the presence of WMDs in the country. The international investigation has concluded the absence of any weaponry of such type in the country which gave the US no justification for invading Iraq. However, due to Hussein being a dictator holding power on sole fear of his citizens and the world, he wanted the international stage to believe in the presence and possession of WMDs by the Ba'ath party. However, instead of maintaining regional influence the deliberate provocation of Saddam Hussein has led to the military invasion of a US-led coalition into the Republic of Iraq.

The Iraq War:

On the 20th of March 2003, a US and UK-led coalition invaded the Republic of Iraq. Baghdad fell in 6 weeks, and 8 months later Saddam Hussein was captured in hiding by American troops. After a public trial, the dictator was prosecuted for crimes against humanity with capital punishment and hanged at dawn for the world to observe. The war however had not ended in that moment as expected, but rather stretched on for another 8 years ending in a humiliating defeat and withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. Who was still fighting?

The national chaos of foreign invasion gave rise to multiple insurgency groups around the country. As previously mentioned, Iraq's complex and diverse ethnic and religious demographic contained mostly three groups; Arab Sunnis, Arab Shias and Kurds. With each group holding distinct political and social goals and ambitions, the insurgency landscape quickly became complex and violent. The Sunni militias had two main groups. the 1920 Revolution Brigades mainly fought against the occupation of the US using guerilla tactics and improvised explosive devices. The Islamic Army of Iraq had similar tactics to the revolution brigades but also opposed radical terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda. The Shiite militias; the Mahdi army were involved in anti-US fighting and violent interceptions with Sunni groups, the Badr Organisation was closely aligned and sponsored by Iran clashing with both government and Sunni militaries. The conflict also drew in regional powers. For example, Iran supported and financed Shia groups to counterbalance the Sunni influence in the country. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries aided Sunni groups in hopes of not letting

Shia dominate both Iraq and Iran. The foreign interventions intensified the conflict in Iraq and prolonged the sectarian divide, deepening instability and violence.

The Iraq War also gave flourishing ground for the development of terrorist organisations. After the depletion of the Iraqi army by the American government in 2003, thousands of former soldiers were left unemployed with military experience and armed weaponry. Many of those people saw a rapid decline in their lives and frustrated with disillusion, many joined insurgent extremist groups like Al-Qaeda seeking revenge on American troops. Al-Qaeda in Iraq grew more radical and violent opposing the US-led forces and later evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS was a more extreme and highly organised group utilising the experience of former military personnel to grow in power and capture new territories. Seeking the unification of the world into a Caliphate the brutal terrorist group spread far beyond Iraq and carried thousands of deadly attacks throughout the world.

The aftermath of the conflict:

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) established by the US military implemented one of the most harmful policies which led to increased instability in Iraq. The “de-Baathification”, removing anyone associated with the Ba’ath party from government positions and disbanding the army led to millions of unemployed unsatisfied citizens. Many experienced officials and military personnel were left unemployed which led to an increase in insurgencies and ISIS recruits. In 2014 ISIS has invaded the state of Syria and captured up to 60% of the countries territory throughout the years. Such destabilisation of the region led to decreased government trust and a great rise in opposition prolonging the harmful aftermath of the conflict.

The post-war political system was created by either foreign american “experts” or Iraqi opposition memebhrs long in exile, neither of who had any real understanding of the state of political and social factors in the country. The new structure aimed at balancing power between various ethnic and religious groups - the prime minister is always Shia, the president is Kurdish, the Speaker of Parliament if Sunni - divided the country even further. Although intended to promote inclusivity, the system drew ethnic lines that have not been as pronounced under other regimes. As political positions became associated with certain groups, the fight for power intensified often overshadowing national interests. This system

also flourished corruption as loyalty became prioritised over accountability or transparency. The widespread instability and inefficiency led to further loss of trust in government among the population.

Furthermore, Iran saw its national interests in destabilising Iraq even more to promote the development of a strong potential danger in a neighbouring state. By supporting certain Shia insurgencies and political parties Iran aims to maintain instability in the government aiding opposition strongly. Hindering Iraq's development many Iraqis were left frustrated. As a result in 2019, Iraq witnessed months-long protests and pogroms as a citizen response to corruption, ineffective government, poor public services and foreign interference. These protests circled into violent police crackdowns resulting in hundreds of deaths. The brutal suppression of the protests is a vivid example of the challenges that Iraq is facing to this day in the aftermath of the American invasion in 2003.

Major parties involved

The Republic of Iraq

Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath government ruling Iraq since the late 1960s has engaged in multiple conflicts including the Iran-Iraq war, and the first Gulf War. The dictatorship was overthrown weeks after the beginning of the invasion after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003. the armed forces fighting against the military coalition led by the US were the regular army, the Republican Guard and paramilitary rebel groups loyal to the regime. After the fall of the dictatorship, the previously loyal military groups joined rebelling militias and terrorist organisations to continue fighting against the Western Invasion.

The United States of America

The US government under the presidency of George W Bush invaded Iraq in 2003 leading a coalition in military intervention. Citing alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction by the Iraqi government and ties to terrorism as justification for the military invasion. The widespread military operation was prolonged for 8 years. After overthrowing the Husein government, the US military imposed a new "democratic" pro-Western artificial

government that has committed a variety of mistakes leading to further destruction and chaos in the Republic of Iraq

The United Kingdom:

the principal ally of the US in the Iraq invasion. The personal relationship between George W Bush and the prime minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair helped establish a strong political and military alliance. Tony Blair initially wanted to resolve the conflict between the US and Iraq through diplomatic means most notably the United Nations. From passing resolutions condemning Iraq's actions in the Middle East to imposing heavy economic sanctions and the presence of foreign inspectors.

Insurgency groups

During the prolonged conflict, various militias emerged both supporting and opposing the coalition forces. The Sunni militias had two main groups. the 1920 Revolution Brigades mainly fought against the occupation of the US using guerilla tactics and improvised explosive devices. The Islamic Army of Iraq had similar tactics to the revolution brigades but also opposed radical terrorist organisations such as Al-Queda. The Shiite militias; the Mahdi army was involved in anti-US fighting and violent interceptions with Sunni groups, Badr Organisation was closely aligned and sponsored by Iran clashing with both government and Sunni militaries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

Although not openly involved, the Republic of Iran provided military aid and support to various militias and rebels in the conflict. Iran aimed to prolong the conflict and weaken the previously dangerous neighbouring state. After the withdrawal of the US-led coalition's military forces, Iran's involvement remained strong in Iraq. To this day the government of Islamic Republic trains Iraqi opposition, sponsors political parties and supplies militias with weapons.

Al-Queda & ISIS:

Al-Queda was established by Abū Muṣ'ab Zarqāwī as an extremely violent insurgency attacking civilians to provoke civil unrest and prone to conflict. Including brutal and inhumane tactics Al-Queda has organised and carried out hundreds of terrorist attacks globally. After the death of Zarqāwī Al-Queda Iraq evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)

due to internal conflict. After invading Syria in 2014 the terrorist organisation was renamed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and later into the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). ISIS is notorious for using social media as a recruitment platform. The main political aim of ISIS is to unite the whole world into a caliphate under radical Jihadi-Salafi Islam.

Timeline of Key Events

1991 - The Gulf War ends with a US-led coalition driving the Iraqi military out of Kuwait. Heavy economic sanctions are imposed on Iraq.

1998 - President Bill Clinton signs the Iraq Liberation Act, making US policy to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

September 11, 2001 - Terrorist attacks on the US start the war on terror and invasions in the Middle East

January 2002 - George W Bush refers to Iraq as the “Axis of Evil” accusing it of supporting terrorism and weapons of mass destruction

March 19, 2003 - the US initiates operation “Iraqi Freedom” air striking Baghdad

April 9, 2003 - Baghdad falls to American troops, the statue of Hussein is demolished

December 13, 2003 - Saddam Hussein is captured by the US forces

2004 - The rise of insurgency and Al-Qaeda in Iraq

2005 - 2006 - Political tensions and escalating sectarian violence

2007 - 2008- The US surge and Decrease in violence

2009 - 2011 - US withdrawal and growth of instability in Iraq

2014 - 2017 - Rise of ISIS and Iraq’s fight to reclaim territory

October 2019 - Widespread anti-government protests leading to political changes

Possible solutions

1. **Reintegrating and Restructuring Iraqi military:** Establishing a restructured military can help prevent insurgency and secure employment for millions of people. Retraining former Iraqi military soldiers can stabilise the country. Securing trust among various ethnic groups can further prevent violent clashes and outbreaks.

2. **Regional Diplomacy and Cooperation:** The involvement of regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia in proxy wars such as Iraq is a contributing factor to the destabilisation of Iraq. Diplomatic efforts to establish agreements between rival states can aid in securing the country. F.e. the establishment of a regional summit.
3. **Enhancing Counter-Insurgency Training:** If the US-led coalitions would focus on the approach of changing the mindset of people rather than direct fighting the rise of insurgencies could be prevented. Counterinsurgency and civilian engagement can reduce the number of insurgencies with public belief in the need for a peaceful Iraq.
4. **Economic development and job creation:** Many Iraqis joined insurgency and terrorist groups due to extreme poverty, no opportunities and unemployment. Investing in infrastructure and economic opportunities can increase the standard of living and decrease the insurgency recruitment.
5. **Community-based reconciliation programs:** Launching reconciliation programs based in the community can help put the victims in the center of the discussion. Encouraging dialogue can heal and empower providing mental health support and amnesty for non-violent members of insurgency groups.