

## Why did the US invade Iraq in 2003?

Muharrem Dogan\*

### ABSTRACT

Although more than a decade has passed after the Iraq War, it is still a controversial question why did the US occupy Iraq in 2003. Many scholars claim that the real reason of the invasion is Iraqi oil which is based on economic reasons. However, it is also claimed that military reasons such as the 9/11 attacks and the assumption of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by Saddam Regime might be real reasons behind the invasion. In addition to these reasons, humanitarian reasons are examined as real reasons in some studies. In this essay, military and economic reasons will be mentioned as real reasons behind the invasion. Furthermore, it will be claimed that there is no strong evidence about humanitarian reasons whether, they are interrelated the invasion or not.

Key Words: Iraq War 2003; 9/11 attacks; international terrorism; Iraqi oil; humanitarian reasons

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\* MA Student the University of Sussex, UK.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

More than twelve years have passed since the Bush administration occupied Iraq in 2003. After the war, scholars have revealed plenty of reasons for the invasion. These studies are particularly based on two main perspectives: firstly, it is claimed that the main reason is strongly related with terrorism and 11 September attacks.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, it is argued that the real reason of the invasion was Iraqi oil.<sup>2</sup>

This essay argues that the main reasons of 2003 invasion are about military and economic reasons. Contrary to what is claimed, humanitarian reasons occupied a modest place in the reasons for the invasion. Hence, the 9/11 attacks, international terrorism and the idea of controlling the Iraqi oil are mentioned as real reasons for the invasion. This essay is divided into three main sections. In the first section, basically, the Iraqi Regime is described as a non-democratic state. After that, the roles of the 9/11 attacks and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are examined. In the second part, Iraqi oil is questioned, whether it was a real reason behind the invasion or not. Finally, human rights and establishing a democratic regime in Iraq are emphasized.

### 2. MILITARY REASONS

It is widely believed that the Saddam Hussein regime was a non-democratic regime in the Middle East. In fact, autocratic regime was established once the Baath Party was in power after the coup of 1963 and the military had controlled the state until the invasion. After the massacre of 22 July 1979, Saddam Hussein eliminated many Baath Party's members to seize power<sup>3</sup> and laid of foundation his dictatorship. For instance, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress Report which was published on 26 January 1983 Saddam Hussein was described as 'a leader of special type who emerged and developed in unique circumstances'.<sup>4</sup> After that, the regime was administered by family party and Iraq has never been a democratic state.

The Saddam Regime was seen as a real problem establishing peace of the world. Hanson claims that Saddam Hussein supported terrorism, attacked or occupied his neighbours, killed thousands of Iraqi citizens and threatened the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, not only he was a potential threat for the

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<sup>1</sup> Hakan Tunç (2005) 'What was it all about after all? The causes of the Iraq war', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26 (2), p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> Antonia Juhasz (2013) *Why the war in Iraq was fought for Big Oil?*, CNN.

<sup>3</sup> Fran Hazelton (1994), *Iraq since the Gulf War*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Fran Hazelton (1994), *Iraq since the Gulf War*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Victor D. Hanson (2013) *Why did we invade Iraq?*, National Review.

Middle East, but also he was a threat for the world. Furthermore, the Bush administration believed that Saddam Hussein sponsored Al Qaeda. Hence, after the 9/11 attacks, the US's main policy was changed to overthrow the Iraqi Regime because it is strongly believed that Al Qaeda would have used Saddam Hussein's weapons against the US.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Bush senior explained Saddam as an 'axis of evil' in the Congress speech in January 2002.<sup>7</sup> It was, in a way, a threat to Saddam Regime. On balance, the US invaded Iraq to change the regime fourteen months after the speech.

The second reason, can also be called as the military reasons behind the invasion, was the assumption of building WMD by Saddam Hussein. It is strongly believed that the US invaded Iraq to overthrow Iraqi Regime which was the potential source of Al Qaeda's WMD.<sup>8</sup> According to Keegan, Saddam Hussein tried to develop nuclear weapons during his 30 years in power and used chemical weapons against Kurdish citizens who lived in Iraq and Iran between 1980 and 1988.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, after 11 September attacks, neo-conservatives argued that Saddam Hussein collaborated with Al Qaeda, or he protected it; he had WMD, or he was making an effort to get them; he was attempting to build nuclear bombs, or he could be doing them in the future; he had been cheating the UN weapons inspectors, or the inspectors were fumbling; he ignored his citizens' request of freedom, or they were deterred. Thus, he was a war criminal and a mass murderer.<sup>10</sup> All these show that the Saddam Regime threatened both his region and the world. Hence, the US occupied Iraq in 2003.

The Bush administration strongly believed that Saddam Hussein should have been destroyed. For example, Paul Wolfowitz who was a Deputy Defence Secretary accepted that 'for reasons that have a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on [i.e. WMD] . . . as the core reason'.<sup>11</sup> Because of these reasons, the US decided to invade Iraq, overthrowing Saddam Regime.

### 3. ECONOMIC REASONS

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<sup>6</sup> Hakan Tunç (2005) 'What was it all about after all? The causes of the Iraq war', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26 (2), p. 340.

<sup>7</sup> John Keegan (2005) *The Iraq War*. 2nd edn. London: Pimlico. p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Hakan Tunç (2005) 'What was it all about after all? The causes of the Iraq war', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26 (2), p. 344.

<sup>9</sup> John Keegan (2005) *The Iraq War*. 2nd edn. London: Pimlico. p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> John Ehrenberg, J.Patrice McSherry, Jose R. Sanchez, and Carolen M. Sayej (2010) *The Iraq papers*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Martin A. Smith (2008) 'US bureaucratic politics and the decision to invade Iraq', *Contemporary Politics*, 14 (1), p. 91.

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Overthrowing Saddam Regime to control Iraqi oil is claimed as a real reason to invade Iraq in 2003. This aspect is quite popular in the Middle East and it is known with the slogan, namely 'no blood for oil'.<sup>12</sup> Hence, it is claimed that the assumption that Iraqi Regime produced WMD is not a real reason<sup>13</sup> and the real reason refers to Iraqi oil. According to Muttitt, 'the most important strategic interest lay in expanding global energy supplies, through foreign investment, in some of the world's largest oil reserves – in particular Iraq'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the US wanted to guarantee oil sources in Iraq because they did not trust Saddam Hussein.

Moreover, Iraqi oil had strategic importance for the US administration. For instance, Russian oil production had increased 10,000 000 barrels per day and Africa had had new supplies such as Sudan and Angola. Therefore, Iraqi oil was the one potential source for Americans. Hence, Ahmed claims that undoubtedly the invasion of Iraq was the first oil war of the current century.<sup>15</sup> In addition, although Iraqi oil was controlled by the Iraq administration before the war, it is privatised and wholly managed by Western oil companies and many international oil companies such as BP and Shell, set up shop in Iraq after 2003.<sup>16</sup> Because of this, it can be claimed that international oil companies, including the US companies ran Iraqi oil after the war.

### 4. HUMANITARIAN REASONS

It is a controversial question that whether the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was to protect Iraqi people from Saddam's persecution. In fact, the humanitarian reasons refer to suffering or persecution from the Saddam Hussein's Regime and they are based on two main frames: Firstly, the human rights frame which refers to Saddam's inhumanity and human rights violations, containing savageries to his citizens and his neighbours, current violations and the promise of humanitarian aid and reconstruction in Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Hence, before invading Iraq, Bush suggested that 'the world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power, as are 25 million people who now have a chance to live in

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<sup>12</sup> Nayna J. Jhaveri (2004) 'Petroimperialism: US Oil Interests and the Iraq War' *Editorial Board of Antipode*, 36 (1), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Martin A. Smith (2008) 'US bureaucratic politics and the decision to invade Iraq', *Contemporary Politics*, 14 (1), p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> Nafez Ahmed (2014) *Iraq invasion was about oil*, The Guardian.

<sup>15</sup> Nafez Ahmed (2014) *Iraq invasion was about oil*, The Guardian.

<sup>16</sup> Antonia Juhasz (2013) *Why the war in Iraq was fought for Big Oil?*, CNN.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Moses, Babek Bahador and Tessa Wright (2011) 'The Iraq War and the responsibility to protect: Uses, abuses and consequences for the future of humanitarian intervention', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5 (4), p. 354.

freedom'.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the freedom frame which references to lack of democracy and how will freedom in Iraq affect the region.<sup>19</sup> For instance, according to neo-conservatives, the main point which deals with terrorism and this non-democratic circumstance was establishing a democratic regime in Iraq. Moreover, they believed that a democratic regime in Iraq would be an example for other countries in the Middle East; in particular Syria and Iran and it could be a long-term solution against terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to the Bush administration, overthrowing the Saddam Regime was necessary to save Iraqi citizens because he was a mass murderer and he had killed many Kurds and citizens of Iraq.

Nevertheless, many scholars claim that there is no evidence whether the war was about human rights or not. On balance, Roth claims that the weapons of mass destruction have not been found or there is no link between the Saddam Regime and international terrorism which has been discovered.<sup>21</sup> In addition, nobody strongly claims that Saddam Hussein was planning mass killing before the invasion. Hence, for giving an answer to the question that were the Iraq war about human rights, he claims that the war was not absolutely about saving Iraqi citizens from persecution.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Moses' study which is based on the US and the UK leaders' speeches in order to find what extent humanitarian reasons were used to invade Iraq shows that five US leaders used 87.8 per cent security narrative to justify the invasion versus only 12.2 per cent for humanitarian reasons.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the security reasons were used more than the humanitarian reasons and there is no strong evidence to claim that humanitarian reasons played vital role on the invasion.

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Moses, Babek Bahador and Tessa Wright (2011) 'The Iraq War and the responsibility to protect: Uses, abuses and consequences for the future of humanitarian intervention', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5 (4), p. 348.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Moses, Babek Bahador and Tessa Wright (2011) 'The Iraq War and the responsibility to protect: Uses, abuses and consequences for the future of humanitarian intervention', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5 (4), p. 354.

<sup>20</sup> Hakan Tunç, (2005) 'What was it all about after all? The causes of the Iraq war', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26 (2), p. 348.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Roth, (2006) 'Was the Iraq War a Humanitarian Intervention?', *Journal of Military Ethics*, 5 (2), p.84.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Roth, (2006) 'Was the Iraq War a Humanitarian Intervention?', *Journal of Military Ethics*, 5 (2), p.84

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Moses, Babek Bahador and Tessa Wright, (2011) 'The Iraq War and the responsibility to protect: Uses, abuses and consequences for the future of humanitarian intervention', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5 (4), pp. 356.

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### 5. CONCLUSION

It is possible to argue that there are many reasons for the invasion in 2003. In common, international terrorism, the assumption of manufacturing WMD by the Saddam Regime and the 9/11 attacks have been pointed out as real reasons of the invasion which are based on the military reasons. In addition to this, economic reasons, in particular oil, are also seen another real reason behind the invasion. Humanitarian reasons such as human rights and establishing democratic regime in Iraq are also quite popular in academic papers.

However, although the humanitarian reasons are quite popular, one of the main reasons behind the invasion was not to save Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein's brutality. Still, it is also clear that humanitarian reasons have played fewer roles in the invasion comparing military and economic reasons. Hence, this essay claims that the 9/11 attacks and the assumption of supporting Al Qaeda by Saddam Hussein were the real reasons of the invasion. In addition, the idea of controlling Iraqi oil was the first oil war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because of this, it was examined the second reason to invade Iraq in 2003.

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