THE AMERICAN INVASION OF IRAQ:
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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As the Middle East has become the centerpiece of its drive for global hegemony, America's de-stabilizing impact on the region has deepened; equally, the reaction from the Middle East to US policy carries important consequences for US hegemony globally. The Iraq war is the pivotal event around which these developments centre.

Explaining the US Invasion of Iraq

The invasion of Iraq can only be properly understood by bringing together three levels of analysis: 1) US global grand strategy 2) the US strategic position in the Middle East; and 3) the interests of Bush's ruling coalition. Understanding the Iraq war, in turn, exposes the inner mainsprings of US Middle East policy and the region's pivotal role in overall US global strategy.

US Global Grand Strategy and the Middle East

The starting point for understanding the invasion of Iraq is the grand strategy of the US under Bush to undertake a coercive assertion of global hegemony. The Project for a New American Century frankly acknowledges this reach for hegemony. The Bush doctrine and the 2002 National Security Strategy, formulated in response to the 9/11 attacks, make explicit the coercive turn: the call for "full spectrum dominance;" the strategy of dealing with resistance to the US not simply through traditional containment, but via "preventive wars;" the resort to unilaterialism, with ad-hoc "coalitions of the willing;" the view that states not with the US in the war on terrorism are against it; and the claim that only the US liberal model is legitimate, with sovereignty exempting no nation from the demand that it conform. This, of course, is all quite a change from traditional US foreign policy which was based on the *containment* of threats and which viewed

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hegemony as being rooted in consent derived from *multilateral* consultation (deviation), hence necessarily limited by international law and institutions; diplomacy, too, was prioritized over military force. By contrast, the architects of the Bush administration strategy had long advocated a strategy of hegemony based on the use of American's exceptional military capabilities.[1]

Reshaping the Middle East is pivotal to the success of this project for several reasons. One of the main pillars of US global hegemony is its protectorate over the "world" oil reserves concentrated in the Persian Gulf; oil is a strategic commodity that everybody needs and is crucial to military power while assuring its flow to the world economy makes US power globally indispensable.[2] The main resistance to US hegemony is also concentrated in the Muslim Middle East, for two inter-linked reasons: US support for Israel and recurring Western intervention in the Middle East to control oil supplies. Indeed, securing US hegemony in the Middle East, at least if it is not to rest on continual coercive intervention, requires that US support for Israel be *balanced* by alliances with Arab clients. Specifically, since support for Israel antagonizes Arabs, balancing requires US leadership in the Arab-Israeli peace process aimed at a compromise land-for-peace solution to the conflict. However, this balancing act has been failing: ever-rising Zionist influence has led Washington to accept-even fund--Israel's colonisation of the very occupied land that had to be the basis of a compromise peace settlement. Nevertheless, all US presidents sustained this balancing policy until Bush Jr: as he abandoned (deviation) historic balancing for an overtly pro-Israeli policy, the invasion of Iraq was seen as an alternative to balancing and a key to a military version of hegemony in the Middle East that would dispense with one based on accommodation of Arab interests.[3]

The Mainsprings of War

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the US is central to understanding the war on Iraq even though Iraq was in no way involved in it. This attack exposed

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[1] Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine,"*Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 118, No. 3, (Fall 2003); Edward Rhodes, "The Imperial Logic of Bush's Liberal Agenda," *Survival* Vol. 45, No. 1, (Spring, 2003), pp. 131-54.

[2] Simon Bromley, *Oil and American Hegemony,* Polity Press, 1991; Atif Kubursi and Salim Mansur, '"Oil & the Gulf war: an American Century or a 'New World Order'?' *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (1993), pp.1-18.

[3]Sherle R. Schwenninger, "Revamping American Grand Strategy, *World Policy Journal,* Vol. 20, No. 3, (Fall 2003); Oystein Noreng, *Crude Power: Politics and the Oil Market,* London, I. B Tauris, 2002. p. 51.

a terrible threat to the US, originating in the Middle East and Muslim world that had to be countered; at the same time, hard-liners in the Bush administration who had advocated an attack on Iraq even *before* 9/11 saw it as an *opportunity* to mobilize support for a war they thought would be decisive in transforming the Middle East to suit US interests.[4]

The first hurdle the Bush administration had to clear was to legitimize war on a state that did not threaten the US. The issue of WMDs was hit upon as a way to turn the 'war on terrorism' against Iraq; to do so, Bush had to claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida and was actively developing weapons of mass destruction which he might turn over to terrorists or use on their behalf, and hence that Iraq represented an imminent threat to the US. These claims have not only been discredited but, additionally, there is strong evidence that the war party in Washington deliberated exaggerated unreliable claims and knew Iraq was no threat to the US. At any rate, the threat was never that WMDs would be used against the USA but that they could constrain US freedom of action in the Middle East or threaten Israel.[5]

To understand the real motives behind the war and why Bush saw an attack on Iraq as the solution to US problems, we need to shift the focus from security threats to the US, per se, toward threats to its strategic

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[4]Cabinet level insiders, notably Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neil and terrorism advisor Richard Clarke, revealed that an attack on Iraq was broached at the first National Security Council meeting of the Bush Administration (Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W Bush, the White House and the Education of Paul O'Neill*; Simon & Schuster, 2004; Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror,* Free Press, 2004).

[5] The report of the Carnegie Endowment For International Peace (Joseph Cirincione, Jessica Mathews, and George Perkovich, *WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications,* Washington, D.C., 2004), concluded that Iraqi WMD capabilities were not a threat since Iraq's nuclear program had been suspended for many years and large-scale chemical weapon production capabilities destroyed or dismantled. Moreover, there was no solid evidence of a cooperative relationship between Saddam's government and Al Qaida. The Carnegie report concluded that the absence of any imminent nuclear or chemical threat was knowable before the war, that the CIA's National Intelligence Estimates had been deliberately misrepresented by administration officials and that none of Secretary of State Colin Powell's claims at the UN stood up to verification. Weapons inspector Scott Ritter (*International Herald Tribune*, February 6, 2004 http://www.iht.com) observed that plenty of experts and former Iraq weapons inspectors had discounted the threat before the war. Compelling evidence that the administration was deliberately misleading Americas about WMDs, Iraq and al-Qaida can be found in the following: Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, "The New Pentagon Papers, http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2004/03/10;" David Corn, "Willful Ignorance," TomPaine.com; John B. Judis and Spencer Ackerman, "The Selling of the Iraq War," *The New Republic*, 30 June 2003; Seymour Hersch, "Who Lied to Whom?," *The New Yorker*, 31 March 2003; Seymour Hersch, "Selective Intelligence," *The New Yorker*, 12 May 2003; Scott Ritter, *Iraq Confidential: The Untold Story of America's Intelligence Conspiracy*, London:, I. B. Tauris, 2005.

situation in the Middle East and its hegemony over the oil market. First, US oil vulnerability was on the rise. US import dependence was rising in an ever-tighter oil market with global production seemingly peaking, hence shifting the balance of power to oil producers.[6] These conditions could make the US and the world capitalist economy vulnerable to an oil shock-historically fatal for US presidents. Iraq was a solution to these potential threats for it had the world's second largest oil reserves and very low production costs. However, as long as Saddam was in power, its oil could not be used for US benefit; the sanctions the US believed essential to contain Saddam meant most Iraqi oil remained off the market and if Saddam were to find some way to overcome them and get out of isolation, the risk increased that he would try to use Iraq's oil for political advantage, as he had tried to do before, specifically by seeking to make access to oil contingent on US policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[7]

What made developments in the oil market more alarming for Washington, however, was the fact that US hegemony over the Middle East and its oil was under threat by the breakdown of the Pax-Americana that had been constructed after the Gulf war of 1991. This hegemony rested on several pillars-the 'dual containment' of Iran and Iraq, the peace process, and the Saudi alliance-but all of these were increasingly shaky.

First, Iraq and Iran were gradually escaping from the isolation the US policy of dual containment had sought to impose on them. The sanctions on Iraq had increasingly been discredited for the humanitarian damage they caused the Iraqi people, and were being challenged by the Arab world, while Iraq was selling oil concessions to other countries, notably Russia, China and France. As for Iran, even Western Europe was keen to engage with rather than isolate it. While US sanctions kept its own companies out of their oil fields and markets, its rivals were penetrating both. Second, the breakdown of the peace process amidst continued Israeli settlement activity in the Palestinian territories and the Islamic terrorism it provoked drove an

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[6]"Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century," *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University and the Council on Foreign Relations*, 2001, p. 4. See also Colin Campbell. *The Coming Oil Crisis*. Brentwood, England: Multi-Science, Publishing and Petro-Consultants, 1997.

[7]John S. Duffield, "Oil And The Iraq War: How The United States Could Have Expected To Benefit, And Might Still," *MERIA Journal* ,Vol. 9, No. 2, (June 2005); Mark Almond, "It's All About Control, Not the Price of Petrol," *New Statesman*, 7 April 2003; Michael T. Klare, "For Oil and Empire? Rethinking the War with Iraq," *Current History*, Vol. 102, No. 662, (March 2003), pp. 129-35.

increasing wedge between the US and the Arabs who had been promised a peace settlement in reward for their support of the US in the Gulf War of 1991. Third, Saudi Arabia had traditionally playing an effective 'swing' role in securing oil and moderating oil prices at the US behest, but the US was dissatisfied with its dependence on Saudi Arabia: the decline in its excess oil pumping capacity reduced its ability to moderate oil prices; the US forces that protected Saudi Arabia were a source of discontent there and, indeed, had turned Osama Bin Laden against America; dependence on the Saudis placed constraints on US Middle East policy (Crown Prince Abdullah had made a high profile expression of impatience with Bush's failure to engage in the peace process); and the participation of Saudi citizens in the 9/11 attacks and in funding al-Qaida gave the neo-cons the opportunity to demonize Saudi Arabia in American public opinion. Saudi Arabia, feeling the US ignored its interests, began looking for alternative solutions to ease its total US security dependence- through conciliating Iran and Iraq. US hegemony in the Middle East rested on its unique ability to balance special relationships with *both* Israel and Saudi Arabia, but this balance was being de-stabilized. In conquering Iraq, the US would acquire a new compliant swing producer, ending dependence on Saudi Arabia. Iraq's conquest would also allow the US to achieve privileged access to Iraqi oil at the expense of its economic competitors in Europe and Asia and its emerging global rival, China. The structural power deriving from oil hegemony would be restored and underlined.[8]

On the other hand, the war on Iraq was expected to decisively assert the *military* dimension of hegemony. Smashing Saddam Hussein, who had famously defied the US, would send the message that the limits of American military power had been overcome. Bush wanted to establish the right to attack countries the US deemed threats and Iraq, being both weak and easily demonized, was an exemplary case to establish the precedent. An easy victory in Iraq followed by images of Iraqis welcoming U.S. troops as liberators would demoralize Arab/Islamic opposition to US hegemony.[9] The US had long sought permanent bases in the Gulf and conquering Iraq would allow their establishment.[10] From this Iraqi base, the US could intimidate remaining resistance from nationalist states like Syria and Iran

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[8] A U.S. diplomatic source told an interviewer that "a rehabilitated Iraq is the only sound long-term strategic alternative to Saudi Arabia." Trevor Royle, "The World's Petrol Station: Iraq's Past Is Steeped in Oil...and Blood," *Sunday Herald*, 6 October 2002; available at http://www.sundayherald.com/print28226).
[9] Marc Lynch, "Taking Arabs Seriously," *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October, 2003).
[10] Joseph Cirincione, "Origins of Regime Change in Iraq." *Proliferation Brief*, 6, 5, March 19, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003.

and impose a pro-Israeli Pax-Americana in the region. And, invading Iraq would allow the imposition of liberalism there and, in a domino effect, spread to the rest of the Middle East, undermining ideologies and regimes inimical to American influence.

Yet obviously, a war on Iraq carried grave risks, not least to a disruption of the oil market that could damage the US and world economy. Moreover, the threats the US faced were neither so immanent that it had to act immediately nor immune to solutions that stopped far short of an invasion of Iraq. Hence US national interests cannot wholly explain the war and why these risks were accepted. The extra ingredient is the special interests of the ruling coalition because a different administration would arguably *not* have gone to war with Iraq and would have pursued other less risky ways of addressing US dilemmas-such as re-starting the peace process and adjusting dual containment; after all, Iraq posed no threat to the US and war with it was on nobody's agenda until the Bush administration put it there.

The Bush Jr administration was to the far-right of the mainstream US foreign policy establishment (delineating the coalition for foreign-policy making). Its foreign policy-making was dominated by a coalition of the extremist/militarist wings of the Zionist lobby (the Likudist neo-cons) and the arms/oil lobbies (Cheney and Rumsfeld). These lobbies were traditionally opposed over Middle East policy, with the arms-oil lobby believing that access to oil and arms profits depended on good relations with the Arabs, and hence some even-handedness in the Arab-Israeli conflict; but under Bush its extremist wing dropped the lobby's traditional concern to appease the Arab regimes and embraced the Zionist agenda. It appears that the likes of Rumsfeld and Cheney had been brought together with neo-cons like Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz in the group formed to petition the Clinton administration for the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime and in the Project for the New American Century which championed a muscular US global hegemony; hence from the beginning, US hegemony and war on Iraq had been linked in their minds.

In addition to this, the oil/arms lobbies had more particular interests that they thought a war might serve. Conflict in the Middle East leads to high oil prices-especially needed for high-cost Texas producers-and to high oil company profits and renewed arms spending and sales; the war was also seen by some oil men as a chance to restore the direct ownership of oil

curtailed by the rise of OPEC through the privatization of Iraqi oil.[11] And the prospect was good that the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq would mean very good pickings for companies, such as Halliburton, associated with the ruling coalition-as indeed it did.[12]

As for the neo-cons, the ideologues of the war, they were intimately tied to Israel's right-wing Likud party and supported Israel's policy of colonization in the occupied territories. But this obstructed a peace settlement and endangered the Arab relations on which oil access depended (particularly with Saudi Arabia); their nightmare was that the US would subordinate Israel's expansionist ambitions to appeasement of the Arab oil producers, especially Saudi Arabia (as Bush Sr. had done). The alternative was the conquest of Iraq. The seizure of Iraq's pivotal oil fields would make appeasement of the Arabs superfluous; Iraq could be used to break OPEC and de-stabilize unfriendly Muslim oil states. In short, the seizure of Iraq would allow the US to secure access to Arab oil without Arab alliances and consent and the last remaining constraints on total US commitment to Israeli interests would be removed.[13]

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[11] Roger Burbach and Jim Tarbell, *Imperial Overstretch: George W Bush and the Hubris of Empire*. London: Zed Books, 2004, pp.155-57; Shimshon Bichler & Jonathan Nitzan, "Dominant Capital and the New Wars," Jo*urnal of World-Systems Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (Summer 2004), pp. 255-327.

[12] Evelyn Pringle, "Iraqis to Bush - Where Did All Our Money Go?" Media Monitors Network (MMN), 12 September 2005.

[13] Only a sampling of the mountain of evidence accumulating on the role of the neo-con- Likud association in the Iraq war can be indicated here. Their close association was suggesting by Thomas Neuman of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, who exalted at the rise of the neo-cons: "The Likudniks are really in charge now." (Laurence A Toenjes, "US Policy Toward Iraq: Unraveling the Web," June, 2003, ww.opednews/com). Neo-cons famously authored a report to the Likudist Netanyahu government advocating a policy of aggressive confrontation with Israel's neighbors, advice even the Israeli prime minister rejected as too risky and extreme; many of the same neo-cons later followed up in sponsoring a famous letter to Clinton urging the removal of Saddam Hussein. In his magisterial account, George Packer (*The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq* NY: Farrar Straus Girous, 2005) concludes that the one thing the neo-cons had in common was "an obsession with Israel" and a belief that the removal of Saddam Hussein would be very good for Israel. According to Joe Klein (*Time*, 5 February 2003): "Israel is very much embedded in the rationale for war with Iraq. It is part of the argument that dare not speak its name, a fantasy quietly cherished by the neo-conservative faction in the Bush administration and by many leaders of the American Jewish Community." According to General Anthony Zinni, a former commander of US forces in the Middle East, the neo-conservatives' role in pushing the war on Israel's behalf was "the worst-kept secret in Washington." (Ori Nir and Ami Eden, "Zinni Charges Neocons Pushed Iraq War To Benefit Israel," *Forward*, 28 May 2004, http://forward.com). According to Philip Zelikow, a neo-con member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board at the time of the attack on Iraq, the "real threat" of Saddam's WMDs was not to America: "I'll tell you what I think the real threat (is) and actually has been since 1990 - it's the threat against Israel." (*Guardian*, 30 November 2003; *Daily Star*, 10 April 2004). For exhaustive documentation

How Bush's extremist faction was able to carry the United States into a war nobody else really wanted, is outside the scope of this paper but crucial to winning the wider public was the alliance between the neo-cons, the wider Zionist lobby, and the right-wing 'Christian Zionists," (further delineation of the alliance) a mass movement whose literal reading of the Bible convinced them that Christ would reappear only after the Jews repossessed the whole "promised land" and who viewed Islam as "a very wicked and evil religion."[14] Congress, under the influence of these lobbies, was brought to abdicate its war-deciding responsibilities.[15] The opposition of the defense and foreign policy bureaucracies had to be systematically overcome by the neo-con network appointed across its command posts.[16] Additionally, public opinion was systematically softened up by a concerted propaganda campaign led by right-wing think-tanks, advertising agencies and pro-Israeli pundits, largely uncontested by a critical or even an objective press.[17] In other words, the "checks and balances" of the American political system all failed utterly.

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of the neo-con role see James Bamford's *Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies*, New York: Doubleday. The fact that several of the key players most aggressively pushing the Iraqi war had originally proposed it for the benefit of another country (Israel) raises, Bamford observes, "the most troubling conflict of interest questions." See also Burbeck and Tarbell, pp. 96-100; Michael Lind, "The Israeli Lobby," *Prospect,* April. 2002 and Joel Beinin, 'Pro-Israeli Hawks and the Second Gulf War, *Middle East Report,* April 2003.

[14]On the Christian Zionists see Norman Madarasz, "A Christian Fundamentalist and Rational Secularist United Front", *Counterpunch,* 12/01/2004 and Godfrey Hodgson, "From frontiersman to neo-con," openDemocracy 24-4-2003.

[15] Louis Fisher, "Deciding on War Against Iraq: Institutional Failures." *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3, (2003).

[16]Cirincione, ("Origins of Regime Change in Iraq") observed that the neo-cons are "a textbook case of how a small, organized group can determine policy in a large nation, even when the majority of officials and experts originally scorned their views." Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and career CIA personnel all opposed them. "Powell's view was that Wolfowitz was fixated on Iraq, that they were looking for any excuse to bring Iraq into this (9/11)," See also the charge of General Colin Powell's chief of staff, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson that a "Cheney 'cabal' hijacked US foreign policy (http://news.ft.com/cms/s/afdb7b0c-40f3-11da-b3f9-00000e2511c8.html). As one insider put it, the neo-cons, "behaved as though they had seized control of the government in a silent coup." They set up- a "shadow government," including creation of an ad-hoc "special office" to cherry-pick intelligence, that by-passed normal bureaucratic procedures meant to ensure objectivity and balance. (W. Patrick Lang, "Drinking the Cool-Aid," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Summer 2004), pp. 42-6).

[17] Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber Rampton, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*, New York, Tarcher/Penguin, 2003, document the abuse of and failures of the media. See Burbach and Tarbell, *Imperial Overstretch ,* pp. 76-124, 149-71, on rightwing advocacy think tanks.

The Consequences of the Iraq War

The Deconstruction of Iraq

The aim of regime change in Iraq was presumably to create a state that would be stable and legitimate, yet also friendly to the United States. The outcome, however, appears to be a failed state plagued by prolonged insurgency, verging on civil war, and in which the main beneficiary appears to be pro-Iranian Shia groups.

This outcome was predictable and predicted by Iraq specialists. Iraq was a fragile artificial state from its creation by Britain, with communal cleavages and instability built- in. Only over several decades of struggle was a formula for stability found: a brutal strongman ruling through a semi-totalitarian party and relying on one of Iraqi's communities against the others. The US in effect deconstructed this state without having-or even planning for-a viable replacement for it (if such a thing was ever going to be possible).

Many argue, however, that the particular way the Bush administration went about regime change much increased the chances of failure. According to Anthony Cordesman, the foremost American expert on Gulf security, the US made multiple "strategic mistakes."[18] It only planned the war it wanted to fight-against the debilitated Iraq army, not against a prolonged insurgency. Washington expected a quick painless war: As George Packer put it, the US went in "undermanned and under-resourced, [expecting to] skim off the top layer of leadership, take control of a functioning state, install imported pro-Western exiles, be out by six weeks and get the oil funds to pay for it."[19] Rumsfeld brushed aside the recommendations of his generals that 400,000 troops would be needed for the occupation and forced them to accept a fraction of that. Inexplicably, US proconsul Paul Bremer exacerbated a dire situation through his dissolution of the Iraqi army, creating at a stroke tens of thousands of experienced and armed fighters that would join the resistance. And the US failed for almost a year to start reconstructing an Iraqi security force while sectarian militias were allowed to fill the vacuum. Similarly, the purge and de-Ba'thification of the bureaucracy and other state institutions deprived the state of experienced officials and created massive numbers of disaffected unemployed.

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[18] Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency.*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies, (23 June 2005).

[19] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyb/content/article/2005/10/06

The original sin of the Iraq war was, perhaps, the neo-con belief that the invasion would be welcomed as liberation and a pro-US "democracy" readily imposed. Anthony Shadid argues that it was never likely the invaders would be welcomed as liberators since Iraqis were nationalistic and harboured deep distrust of the US and UK, owing to the colonial experience, the decades of sanctions they imposed on the country and America's near total support for Israel.[20]

Toby Dodge and others show that the conduct of the occupation multiplied powerful new grievances which created an insurgency that might not have been inevitable had the US acted differently in Iraq.[21] As it was, the invasion resulted in the breakdown of security, infrastructure, and public health, and the death of perhaps 100,000 people, mostly civilians, in the first year of war and occupation.[22] The initial imposition of a puppet government of mostly exiles without popular bases in Iraq; the mass unemployment inflicted by the dissolution of the army, purge of the bureaucracy and public sector layoffs, the halving of GNP/capita compared to 2001; the flooding of the country with foreign mercenaries and contractors; the near-absence of reconstruction (compared unfavourably by Iraqis to the performance of the Saddam regime after the 1991 war); the expenditure of reconstruction money outside Iraq or its dissipation through massive corruption, war profiteering, and enormous salaries for foreign contractors; the open US avowal of its intention to acquire permanent military bases in Iraq; its attempt, in violation of the Geneva convention, to privatize and sell off Iraq's oil assets to Western buyers-all ensured Iraqis would see the invaders as occupiers, not liberators. Cordesman argues that the biggest mistake which turned Iraqis against the occupation was its failure to make the security of Iraqis a priority.[23] Another analyst points to the plan to sell off Iraq's oil as a main driver of the insurgency.

On top of this, however, the heavy-handed US approach to counter-insurgency arguably helped fuel it. Symptomatic to the US approach, a US commander infamously declared: "With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that

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[20]Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War,* New York: Henry Holt, 2005.

[21]Toby Dodge, "War and Resistence in Iraq: From Regime Change to Collapsed State," in Fawn and Hinnebusch, *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences,* Boulder CO Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2006, pp. 211-224.

[22]The British medical journal *Lancet* , October 2004.

[23]Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies, 23 June 2005.

we are here to help them."[24] It has been pointed out that the US used tactics pioneered by Israel in occupied Palestine[25]: bombing and firing on densely populated urban areas; demolishing homes, collective punishment of villages, herding of thousands into detention camps, food blockades of suspected insurgent areas, the abuses revealed at Abu Ghraib, not to mention the "daily humiliations and occasional brutalities that come with the presence of an occupying army."[26] US troops were widely seen as "lacking in respect for the country's people, religion and traditions" and "indiscriminate in their use of force when civilians are nearby." Inevitably, this approach only enflamed resistance which mushroomed into a potent force of up to 20,000 fighters equipped with explosives capable of knocking out even heavily armoured vehicles. America's inability to pacify the country shattered its aura of military invincibility, showing that asymmetric warfare can checkmate the strongest military power in the world.

Iraqi disaffection came very rapidly. Western polls in the year after the invasion showed that 82 percent of Iraqis opposed the occupation and 57 percent wanted foreign troops to leave immediately; five percent or less of Iraqis believed the U.S. invaded 'to assist the Iraqi people,' destroy WMDs or establish democracy, while 43% said the aim was 'to rob Iraq's oil.' More than 50 percent said attacks on US troops were 'justified' or "sometimes justified."[27] Over two years of occupation, Iraqi opinion only hardened against the occupiers.

On top of this, reconstruction of the Iraq proceeded in a flawed way that was, perhaps, bound to create a failed state. The destruction of the secular Ba'thist centre left a vacuum in which sectarian/ethnic leadership took over. US policies of relying on the Kurds against the Arabs and the Shia against the Sunnis and the institutionalization of ethnic/sectarian politics in the ruling bodies the US co-opted, reinforced sectarian divisions. Constructing security forces by relying on the Shia and Kurds made Sunnis perceive the "national" army as a sectarian force. Elections merely reflected this environment: sectarian groups voted in elections as blocs, creating what looked like permanent triumphant majorities and disaffected

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[24] *Christian Science Monitor*, (11 December 2003).

[25] Tony Karon, "Learning the Art of Occupation from Israel," *Time Magazine*, (8 December 2003).

[26] Mark Danner, "Delusions in Baghdad," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50, No. 20,(18 December 2003).

[27] *Washington Post*, 13 May 2004; *Christian Science Monitor,* 29 April 2004; "Most Iraqis Mistrustful of US-Led Coalition, Poll Finds," Agence France Presse, 12/1/03, http://www.middle-east-online.com.

minorities.[28] The so-called "federalist" constitution broke up state authority into cantons and precipitated a struggle among them over oil resources. This created fertile ground for extremist insurgents who tried to provoke civil war as a way of preventing consolidation of what they saw as a collaborationist regime. While many of these outcomes are commonly critiqued as unintended mistakes, the de-construction of the Iraqi state, depriving Iraq of collective purpose or identity, is compatible with the neo-con's pro-Israeli goals of debilitating the main potential Arab power.[29]

Consequences for the Middle East: radical empowerment?

The neo-cons expected that the conquest of Iraq would decisively transform the Middle East, empowering pro-US currents, marginalizing radical forces and reinforcing the power of Israel. The US was warned by Middle East leaders and area experts that the war would have unpredictable, disastrous consequences for the Middle East. President Mubarak feared it would "open the gates of hell" and Bashar al-Asad predicted the US would not be able to control Iraq. They proved to be right, with the actual consequence of the US invasion being largely the opposite of those intended.

At the beginning of the Iraq war, Iran, surrounded by US forces or proxies and the next likely target of the neo-cons, seemed slated to be a big loser. However, the tables have been turned and Iran has been empowered. The rise of Shia power in Iraq gives Iran great influence in the country, enables it to tie down US troops and reduces the threat that the US might attack it. The rise in oil prices accompanying the war has also given Tehran new confidence. The US has made Iran's nuclear capabilities an issue of international crisis but the threat to Iran from the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan is a key factor in its possible drive for a nuclear deterrent and in the rise of the militantly anti-Western Ahmadinejad administration at the expense of moderate reformers.

Syria also seemed a likely loser in the Iraq war, demonized by Washington for its opposition to the invasion and thereafter sandwiched between US forces to the east and the Israelis in the west. The US tried to weaken and isolate the reformist regime of Bashar al-Asad that would

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[28] Stephen Biddle, "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 2006).

[29] Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, *Globalization or Empire,* NY & London: Routledge, 2004, p. 55.

otherwise probably have led Syria into the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, setting the country well on the road to economic liberalization and integration into a Westcentric order. US pressure and Syria's isolation retarded domestic reform, strengthened the regime's nationalist credentials, radicalized regime rhetoric and pushed Syria into the arms of Iran. By demonizing Syria, the US gave it an incentive to see America fail in Iraq and to try to tighten its grip in Lebanon.

American efforts to punish Syria for its opposition to the Iraq war by attacking it in its weak spot, Lebanon, probably precipitated the Hariri killing that polarized the country and was used by the West to force Syria out of Lebanon. But Syria and Iran still had their trump card in Lebanon-Hizbollah. This set the scenario for the war in the summer of 2006 when Israel tried to destroy Hizbollah and instead devastated Lebanon's economic recovery and intensified a struggle for power there between pro-Syrian/Iranian forces and a Lebanese government that had become dependent on US/French patrons for survival. The result could yet return the country to civil war.

The Bush administration thought that invading Iraq would substitute for brokering a peace process in Palestine and, by demoralising all resistance to Israel, enable a US-Israeli dictated peace settlement. Indeed, the attempt to smash US opponents in Iraq was a page borrowed from the Israeli book of using force to smash resistance to its occupation of Palestine. A major mistake, rooted in the belief that the conquest of Iraq would allow a dictat in Palestine, was the US demonization of moderate PLO leader Yasir Arafat and the full backing it gave to the coercive polices of the Sharon government. These sought to systematically destroy and discredit the Palestinian Authority while expanding illegal Israeli settlements that were likely to make a Palestinian state non-viable. Israel's apartheid policies, with their interminable checkpoints, Bantustans, and separation walls, would have been impossible without US financing and support. The electoral victory of Hamas was the consequence of failing to deal with Palestinian moderates. The effective empowering of the rejectionists on both sides by Bush makes a settlement of the conflict in Palestine all the harder, with incalculable consequences for unending regional instability.

On the face of it, Israel appeared initially to be a big winner from the Iraq war. The destruction of Iraq as a power in the Arab-Israel power

balance, the connections Israel built with Iraqi Kurds, and the diminution of Syria's strategic stature were to its advantage.[30] However, Israel's inability to destroy Hizbollah in its summer 2006 war or to subdue Hamas and the Palestinians, plus the enhanced stature of Iran, means that there has been no positive transformation in its strategic situation.

On the contrary, an unintended consequence of the Iraq war was to generate what pro-Western Sunni leaders have called a "Shiite axis", a radical bloc which helps fuel anti-Israeli Islamic militancy in the Middle East. It includes Shiite Iran, some of Iran's Shia supporters in Iraq, and Hizbollah. However, this axis reaches beyond the Shia to embrace Syria, which is majority Sunni, the Sunni insurgency in Iraq and Hamas. Indeed, the cleavage between this bloc and its opponents is less a sectarian one than between those who resist US hegemony, which the Iraq war was meant to consolidate, and those who accept it. Pro-US Arab states fear this force which potentially de-legitimises their alignment with Washington, especially as neither US nor Israeli power seem able to destroy it.

Indeed, pro-US forces have been weakened by the war. The war caught all the pro-US Middle East regimes between their populations who widely opposed it and their US alignment; hence it further eroded their already precarious legitimacy. This makes democratization more risky for all of them. Moreover, across the region, Muslim liberals were put on the defensive for their Western backing while the war empowered their radical Islamist opponents. Authoritarian regimes also benefited in that the chaos in Iraq was widely seen as an example of the disastrous consequences of forced democratization, namely an anarchy to which most citizens preferred authoritarian order.

Worse yet, the Iraq much advanced the prospects of a "clash of civilizations." Each American intervention in the Middle East has spread and deepened Muslim hostility to the US. This began over Palestine in the Arab heartland but spread next to Iran (revived there by US spurning of Khatemi's dialogue of civilizations), thereafter to Afghanistan and Pakistan and, with the Iraq war, to the wider Muslim world and the Muslim Diaspora in the West. The Iraq war, the most intense US intervention yet, was the occasion for empowering those on both sides who advocated a "clash of civilizations." On the one side, the neo-cons, Christian fundamentalists and

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[30] Clive Jones, "Israel: Major Beneficiary," in Fawn and Hinnebusch, *The Iraq War,* pp. 187-95.

pro-Israeli lobby around the Bush administration, on the other the disparate Islamic forces clustering around the al-Qaida networks and further stimulated by the Iraq war, together generated an action/reaction spiral of hostility in which Muslim terrorists acts inspired by grievances over Iraq reinforce Islamophobia in the West.

Additionally, as studies have demonstrated, the single most potent generator of "terrorism" is foreign occupation:[31] now, to the occupation of Palestine is added that of Afghanistan and Iraq which, according to former CIA anti-terrorist expert Michael Scheuer, are "completing the radicalization of the Islamic world." According to former US anti-terrorism czar, Richard Clarke, the invasion of Iraq "delivered to al-Qaida the greatest recruitment propaganda imaginable."[32] Iraq has become a training ground for terrorism, arguably giving rise to a new generation of fighters, as the Afghan conflict did, who will be dangerous opponents when they return to their own countries carrying bin Laden's vision and new skills in asymmetric warfare. Moreover, the war has produced a friendly "sea" in which jihadi recruits can multiply. The war resulted in a dramatic increase in Muslim hostility to the US and, what is most striking in this regard, is how Bush managed to alienate the publics of allied states in which America had invested over decades: Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.[33] If there is one underlying explanation for why US policy has produced results the opposite of what Washington intended, it is that military force, when lacking in legitimacy, stimulates resistance rather than compliance.

Global Consequences: US Hegemony at Risk

Will the Iraq war advance or set back the US reach for muscular global hegemony? This will depend on whether it ultimately demonstrates or discredits the utility of "preventive war" and whether it sustains or

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[31] Henry Munson, "Islamic Militancy," in Fawn and Hinnebusch, *The Iraq War,* pp. 238-41.

[32] Ibid., p. 243.

[33] A congressional report found that "there is deep and abiding anger toward U.S. policies and actions." in the Middle East Large majorities in Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia "view George W. Bush as a greater threat to the world order than Osama bin Laden" and the United States is viewed as "less a beacon of hope than a dangerous force to be countered." (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/23). Only 7% of Saudis, 15% of Turks and 6% of Egyptians had a favorable view of the U.S. (http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/05). One percent of Jordanians and Palestinians, 17% of Indonesians and 19% of Pakistanis had a favorable view of the US in summer 2002 (Hiro, *Secrets and Lies,* pp. 352-3). More remarkably, in Kuwait, a country the US had recently liberated from Iraq, only 28% had a favorable view (Rampton and Stauber, p. 30, 34)

undermines the legitimacy of US global leadership.

The Iraq war is a test case of the doctrine of "preventive war" and of the neo-cons' belief that overwhelming military superiority can be translated into unchallenged hegemony in the Middle East. However, the play has not gone according to script. For one, the exposure of intelligence failures and its manipulation for political ends, undermined the credibility of the doctrine of pre-emption. Thus, even David Kay, Bush's weapons inspector in Iraq, said of the failure to find Iraqi WMDs after the war: "If you cannot rely on good, accurate intelligence, that is credible to the American people and others abroad, you can't have a policy of pre-emption." Additionally, Iraq now appears to be a case of "imperial overreach." The neo-cons promised that the cost of the war would be carried by Iraq itself, or that Europe, Asia and the Gulf Arab states would pay for it, an expectation encouraged by the first Iraq war which in this case proved hollow;[34] instead, the war cost to the US treasury reached $204.4 billion by 2005.[35] Bush's combination of tax cuts and military adventures turned the $127 billion budget surplus he inherited in 2001 into a $374 billion deficit in 2003; the US combination of excessive military spending with high domestic consumption and low taxes, may still bring the Bush juggernaut to a halt. Moreover, US troops killed reached 3,000 in 2006 and total casualties (including injured) had topped 17,000 by 2005.[36] The military was badly over-stretched. Revelations of the deception practised by the neo-cons in their drive to war threw into doubt the triumphalist discourse on American empire encouraged by the initial military victory. The fear that empire abroad was incompatible with liberal democracy at home was reinforced by the erosion of civil liberties, the most egregious example of which was the government's claim that it could keep a US citizen designated an "enemy combatant" imprisoned indefinitely without charges. As the costs rose and the administration's deceptions were exposed, American opinion turned against Bush's war.

Iraq was also a test case both of Bush's strategy of constructing ad-hoc "coalitions of the willing" that would unquestioningly follow US leadership and of whether his declared right of pre-emptive war would be

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[34]Schwenniger, "Revamping America's Grand Strategy"

[35]http://news.independent.co.uk, 20 January 2004; Erik Leaver, "The Costs of Quagmire," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, 14 September 2005, *http://www.ips-dc.org/iraq/quagmire/*

[36]Reuters, 13 November 2003.

accepted by allies and rivals alike. There is normally a powerful incentive to bandwagon with rather than balance against the hegemon. But the US had to expend considerable political capital in its effort to legitimize the Iraq war. Even core allies, France and Germany, resisted while Washington was unable, in the run-up to the war, to get the UN Security Council votes of even weak states like Guinea and Cameroon and otherwise friendly neighbours like Mexico. Washington's use of the expression "coalition of the willing" conveys the illusion that the war was an international venture; but, the vast majority of states in this "coalition" provided only token support and many actually sought aid packages in return for it. They bandwagoned with the US in Iraq less out of belief in the rightness of the invasion than for reasons of self interest, inducement, intimidation or attempts to minimize the damage that a unilateralist hegemon could inflict on the wider global order. Moreover, American-aligned governments were opposed by large majorities of their own populations, among whom support for a war carried out "unilaterally by America and its allies" and widely seen to be about oil, did not rise above 11 percent in any European country, including in Eastern Europe where governments were most pro-American.[37] In the Middle East region, weak states, enjoying little legitimacy at home, could not afford to balance against their protector (in the case of the Gulf states) or paymaster (Jordan, Egypt) and, despite fearing that it would destabilize the region and in defiance of their own publics, accommodated themselves to the invasion (with the exception of Syria which alone expressed widespread regional opinion in its opposition).

The war was a test of how far overwhelming military power can impose *fait accomplis* that reshape international norms. The US succeeded in getting post-facto partial but unprecedented UN legitimation of an occupation resulting from an illegal war, and it had some success in inducing other states to assume small parts of its burdens in Iraq. The main reason was that few states believed it in their interest that Iraq become an epicentre of instability in the Gulf; hence, through its fait accompli, the US coerced Security Council members into post-war acquiescence in policies they opposed. Still, other states proved quite unwilling to contribute significant funding or troops to rescue the American project as long as Washington refused to turn over its authority to the UN.

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[37]According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted shortly before the war began, a majority of respondents in France (75 percent), Germany (54 percent), and Russia (76 percent) agreed with the statement that "the United States wanted to control Iraqi oil." But opposition to the war in states nominally supporting the US ran at least as high: 73% in Italy, 79% in Denmark, 67% in the Czech republic, 82% in Hungary and 63% in Poland.

The longer-term costs of the war for US hegemony appear to be significant. Others states are beginning to perceive a hegemon that declares it will not be constrained by international institutions or the opinions of allies to be a threat to-rather than a guarantor of-global stability. Arguably, Bush has seriously eroded the alliance system upon which America's hegemonic leadership rests. Europe's main security fear was no longer, as in the Cold War, that Washington would abandon it but that it would destabilize the Middle East and stir up Western-Islamic tensions. Complained one European official: "many of us who will be deeply affected [by American policy in the Middle East] have no opportunity even to make our voice heard, let alone to influence anything."[38] According to Z. Brzezinski, trust, an essential ingredient of power, had been sacrificed by the neo-cons' preoccupation with 'reshaping the Middle East at the expense of maintaining America's ability to lead globally.' [39] Bush weakened what was, after 9/11, a budding cordial relationship with Russia, based partly on a perception of a shared interest in countering the Islamist threat; thereafter a Russian leader spoke for many in declaring that "if someone tries to wage war on their own account . . .without an international mandate, it means all the world is...a wild jungle"[40]

Another major cost of the war has been the loss of respect suffered by Washington in global public opinion. Arthur Schlesinger wrote that "the global wave of sympathy that engulfed the US after 9/11 has given way to a global wave of hatred of American arrogance and militarism."[41] The proportion of people around the world who had a favourable view of the US dropped precipitously as a result of the war.[42] In a Time Magazine poll just before the war, 84% of Europeans identified the US as the main threat to world peace.[43] For Jurgen Habermas, "the moral authority of the United States lies in ruins."[44]

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[38]Clyde Prestowitz, "America the Arrogant: Why Don't We Listen Anymore?," washingtonpost.com. 7 July 2002; p. B01.

[39]Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Another American Casualty: Credibility," 9 November 2003;

Page 01, http://www.washingtonpost.com.

[40]Gabriel Kolko, "The Coming Elections and the Future of American Global Power," *Counterpunch,* (12-14 March 2004).

[41]*Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 2003.

[42]Those with a favorable view of the US drooped in France from 63 to 31%, in Italy from 70 to 34; in Russia from 61 to 28; in the UK from 75 to 48; (Rampton and Stauber , p. 6).

[43] *International Herald Tribune,* 1-2 February 2003.

[44] Quoted in Pietrese, p. 29.

US soft power had hitherto substantially been exercised *through not against* international law and institutions, but, "at no time in the last 50 years," Hendrikson argued, "has the US stood in such antagonism to both the primary norms and the central institutions of international society," namely, sovereignty and the presumptive judgement against the first use of force, a norm established because of "disastrous experience with the contrary practice."[45] The war, which the UN Secretary General declared illegal,[46] was launched in defiance of the UN while the Geneva Convention and the laws of war were disregarded in the treatment of prisoners and the occupation of Iraq.[47] The message from Washington was that it was exempt from the rules that applied to others.

Whether US authority can be restored depends on whether there is wide acceptance of the US claim that new threats-pariah states, terrorism, Islam itself-make its military hegemony indispensable to world order or whether other states will come to fear that Washington is itself part of the problem in helping to construct a "clash of civilizations" which threatens this order. This, in turn will depend, in good part, on the outcome in Iraq.

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[45]David Hendrickson, "Toward Universal Empire: the dangerous quest for absolute security," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (Fall, 2002).

[46] In Sept 2003, Kofi Annan said that "if this doctrine [of preventive war] were to be adopted, it could set precedents that resulted in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without credible justification. This logic represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfectly, world peace and stability have rested..." (*New York Times*, 24 September 2003).

[47] Kenneth Roth. "The Law of War in the War on Terror." *Foreign Affairs*, (January/February 2004).