Analyzing the effects and impacts of the 2003 invasion of Iraq

How and to what extent did the Iraq invasion and occupation between the years 2003

and 2005 impact the rise of radical Islamic terrorism?

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Introduction

"Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution" (Bush); with these words, United States President George W. Bush introduced the genesis of the "War on Terrorism" during the aftermath of the 11th September attacks sixteen years ago. Only two years later, on the 20th March 2003, the United States, alongside with Britain, invaded Iraq and occupied it for nearly a decade. Today, in view of the crises in Iraq and Syria and in the wake of a re-emergence of threats from terrorist organizations, the consequences of the Iraq invasion seem to resurface. During the war, more than 150000 civilians had lost their lives; by 2007, about 4 million people had been displaced internally or forced to flee the country. These statistics however, are merely tangible indicators of a level of disaster in Iraq that goes beyond quantitative measures. Political instability, sectarian conflicts and the ultimate rise of fundamentalism can all be attributed to the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. The aftermath of the war has started a new era in political history, where the world system is no longer challenged by the nation-states of the 19th century, but threatened by violent organizations of ideological basis.

This thesis will hence examine the effects of the invasion of Iraq from March 2003 until 2005, ending with the first parliamentary elections in December. Taking the interdisciplinary approach between History and Global Politics, the historical method will be applied in order to evaluate different viewpoints and come to coherent conclusions; simultaneously, the global politics approach within this essay will ensure that both the political causes and implications of the issue are explored and discussed throughout. With the desire to topple the Saddam regime and obliterate terrorism, the US invaded Iraq, a decision, which had consequences on a both local and global scale. Failures in military and political policies serve as the main indicators for illustrating the

extent to which misleading policies create conditions of fertile soil for the rise of ideology, enabling extremism to prosper. Social and political discrimination, including the replacement of the Sunni bureaucracy, the security mistakes by the US forces during the suppression of domestic insurgent groups and the process of "de-baathification" all contributed to gradual political instability, positively impacting also the psychological factors that contribute to the rise of extremist ideology, centered on feelings of humiliation and revenge. In these circumstances, the created sociopolitical vacuum paved the way for the rise of ideology and with it insurgent groups that pursue violent and sectarian ideals.

How such forms of extremism and these, so-called jihadist, structures are defined is a critical point in analyzing their origins and development. Jihadism is a term often used to describe Islamist militant movements, a concept, which in itself has been subject to scholarly discussion. The term may generally refer to diverse forms of social and political activism, striving to establish Islamic principles in all areas of public and political life. Political analyst Robin Wright has argued that such movements, which call for the full implementation of Islamic Sharia, pursue "violent tactics and commit human rights violations" to redefine "politics and even borders" (17). In a situation where violence is used in the pursuit of political or ideological aims to spread fear, in particular against civilians, one may speak of terrorism. Radical Islamic terrorism hence refers to terrorist acts committed by groups or individuals professing Islamic motives.

Background to the invasion

Following a period of containment after the 1991 Gulf War, removing the Saddam regime became substantial part of US foreign policy, paving the way for the enactment of the Iraq Liberation War. Attempting to "remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq" (qtd. in Pirnie and O'Connell 22), it acted as a prelude to the future war efforts put forward by the Bush administration. Indeed, after Bush´s electoral victory in 2000, US foreign policy adopted a more radical stance towards the Iraqi regime, calling for "full implementation" of the Liberation Act (Isakhan 12).

Particularly, the main allegations against the Iraqi government focused around its possible possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. However, whether or not an underlying desire for regime change was an objective to the coalition´s mission has been subject to scholarly debate. In 2002, British Prime Minister Tony Blair had states that the "purpose of our action (…) is to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction" (qtd. Pirnie and O'Connell 8). Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that political rhetoric was different in the United States. Bush, who himself had declared in October 2002 that "the stated policy of the United States is regime change" (qtd. in Isakhan 11), put forward numerous efforts to publicly campaign against and question the general credibility of the Iraqi regime. As political scientist Steven Kull has argued, "the administration had succeeded in creating a sense that there is some connection" between the terrorist attacks of the 11th September and the Saddam regime. Indeed, such view is substantiated by a domestic March 2003 poll, indicating that 45% of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was "personally involved" in the atrocities of 2001. In fact however, the United States National Commission on Terrorist Attacks had, already in the year 2004, concluded that "there was no evidence" (qtd. in Lieberfield 4) of a collaborative partnership between the Saddam regime and terrorist organizations.

Nevertheless, the strategies of the Bush administration did succeed in creating a common casus belli, behind which preparations for war continued.

Despite numerous efforts mainly from the United States to convince the UN Security Council of a "pre-emptive" military strike against the Saddam regime, it failed to secure a majority. Intelligence evidence failed to substantiate American allegations against Iraq, for the United Nations Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) for example, did not find "evidence of the continuation (...) of programs of weapons of mass destruction". Hence, without support from the United Nations, an Anglo-American coalition invaded Iraq on the 20th March 2003 and occupying the country until December 2011 (Pirnie and O'Connell 5).

Root causes of terrorism

When in 2002 asked about the strategy of the newly declared "War on Terror", United States president Bush said, "We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror" (qtd. in Krueger and Maleckova 123). Indeed, the extent to which the consequences of the Iraq military invasion acted as a positive factor for the rise of terrorism can only be evaluated when closely examining the root causes of terrorism. In such context, important considerations to make include both political and social aspects, which in combination, pave the way for the emergence of terrorism. It is thus important to differentiate between preconditions, factors that, over the long-run, set the stage for terrorism, and precipitants, immediate occurrences that precede the creation of terrorism (Crenshaw 384). Although social divisions and lack of prospects do contribute to social division, political instability and the appeal of ideology both also play a substantial role in the development of terrorism.

Periods of political transformation and instability play a significant role in the development of terrorism; in times of relative political insecurity, change may create power vacuums, which terrorist groups may seize to develop internally and rise publicly. Social divisions may be brought about by economic deprivation or political failures, fermenting public dissent. Then, a particularly weak government may fail to adequately handle radical domestic insurgencies, accelerating the emergence of terrorist structures (Krueger 59). On one side, the government's permissive role in the development of terrorism may be traced back to inefficiency and failures in law enforcement; on the other side however, the absence of democratic structures in a society may further exacerbate both government inefficiency and tendencies for radicalism (Lister 17). Economist Krueger, who has argued, that "more liberal and democratic countries are significantly less likely to produce transnational terrorism" (27), substantiates this viewpoint, underlining the idea that liberal institutions are more successful in preventing the rise of terrorism. Although it has, in objection, often been put forward that the democratic state creates permissive opportunities for terrorists, by for example respecting civil liberties through restrictions on surveillance, the liberal society indeed reduces radical tensions by offering individuals the opportunity to articulate their demands through non-violent ways (Krueger 74). When, by contrast, society succumbs to totalitarian governmental methods, such as violent repression, social divisions are incited and exacerbated, thereby promoting radicalization.

A further role in the development of terrorism is played by both ideology and political grievances. Indeed, sociopolitical grievances can act as an enabling, rather than just permissive factor to the creation of terrorism, thereby providing both motivation and direction for terrorist movements. Such conditions are brought about for example in the existence of concrete grievances among a particular, and identifiable, group of people.

Political dissatisfaction of this scale may be brought about by a variety of different factors, including discrimination, feelings of deprivation or lack of political voice. In these circumstances, broader social movements emerge, attempting to redress social inequality; radicalization and the emergence of terrorist movements may then be extremists factions of a greater social upsurge (Krueger and Maleckova 129).

When political dissatisfaction prevails, a minority may commence to pursue more violent strategies, seeking radical change. Such sentiments are further exacerbated by precipitant factors, which incite and provoke radicalism and precede outbreaks of terrorism immediately. Government use of unexpected force or radical changes in official policy may create, as historian Martha Crenshaw has referred to it, an "action-reaction syndrome" (qtd in Krueger and Maleckova 127). Indeed, desires for retaliation will positively affect the emergence of terrorism, for individuals may question the legitimacy of the government, regard its actions as intolerable and unjust, and choose to seek for revenge and ultimately radical change. Often, the connections between a terrorist's strive for "glorification" and the pursuit of rational goals has also been highlighted. Martha Crenshaw, for example, has identified terrorists as "rational actors", who serve for the benefit of the collective and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater goal of the organization (Listner 22).

The invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003: Consequences and effects

The Invasion and occupation of Iraq, which lasted until December 2011 but found its acute phase in the years leading up to the first parliamentary elections in December 2005, has been subject to resonating controversy within, and beyond the academic sphere. Discussions surrounding it continue to have undeniable political implications, which go beyond the borders of Iraq and find transnational significance. The consequences of Iraq´s occupation, including endemic violence, a nonfunctioning state apparatus, an inefficient economy and a deeply divided society, continue to shape the political face of the country. Indeed however, the political implications of such conditions act also as fertile soil for the rise of terrorism, which, as previously discussed, finds its roots in instability and sociopolitical divisions.

The political failures following the invasion of Iraq are primarily revealed through the inadequacy of provisional governments, which were established after Bush announced the "end of major combat operations" in May 2003 (qtd. in Gordon 29). Military success in Iraq was predetermined, taking into consideration the weakness of the Iraqi forces, which had experienced devastating wars in the previous decades and was substantially affected by embargo and sanctions. The second objective in Iraq however, aiming to construct a new government, was far more difficult to attain. On the 21st April 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was established under Paul Bremer and given legislative, executive and judicial powers. Bremer´s foremost concern focused on the policy of "de-Baathification", seeking to disestablish the Baath party from positions of sociopolitical relevance (Katzmann 249). However, political analysts such as Benjamin Isakhan have often criticized Bremer´s political intentions, regarding it as counterproductive, exacerbating social divisions and polarizing the Iraqi society to an

even greater extent (51). Indeed, the choice of de-Baathification over a process of political reconciliation came with both unintended and devastating consequences. Although the coalition had aimed to initiate fast change with immediate political implementations, the inherent weaknesses and miscalculations of such policy can hardly be overlooked. The regulation of the Iraqi military for example, reduced the size of the army by approximately 300000 men, who were put out of work immediately and struggled to find new occupations due to the former affiliation with the Baathist government (Agalday 48). Thus, anti-coalition sentiments among soldiers, which had inevitably already been a product of the humiliating defeat again US forces, were further enflamed, stirring up antagonism against the coalition. Overall, it is estimated that 100000 civil servants, doctors and teacher were forcibly removed from the public sector (Lee 62). However, through marginalizing the Sunni Arab population, which had ruled the modern the state of Iraq since its founding in 1921, the destruction of the entire state apparatus was an inevitable consequence. The policy de-baathification hence proved to be of definite brinkmanship; although the Baathist ruling class was eliminated to a substantial extent, the resulting nationalist backlash, particularly among the Sunni population of Iraq, manifested itself through anti-foreign sentiment and increased violent activity. Political analysts such as Sissons have emphasized upon the idea that de-Baathification also played into the hands of the country´s Shia political authorities, who had previously been subjected to political repression by the Sunni elite and now viewed de-Baathification as a "sectarian instrument" to prevent a re-emergence of the ruling class (qtd. in Byman 614).

Any effort to rebuild a country torn by war, and shattered in its sociopolitical landscape, should include both political reconstruction with a legitimate government apparatus and social reconstruction, enabling the development of a functioning

economy and the creation of a working infrastructure. However, by contrast, lack of political control will hinder the creation of an effective government, thus also limiting the extent to which social reconstruction is possible. Particularly in the post-conflict landscape of Iraq after 2003 however, the implementation of reconstructive measures can only become possible if security is granted. If political security is insufficient however, disorder and desperation will persist, almost creating a Hobbesian trap in which force and violence dominate over democratic development and reconciliation. Iraq´s social polarization and the drive towards radicalization was therefore partially also due to the coalition´s insufficient security measures. On one side, inadequate numbers of forces were deployed in the country. Political analysts such as Larry Diamond have argued that that around "300000 troops might have been enough to make Iraq largely secure" (40); however, even immediately after the invasion, the US had no more than around 190000 troops deployed in the country (Brown 22). A higher number of post-invasion forces, by contrast, would have possibly been able to initiate reconstructive measures through law enforcement and peace maintenance. On the other side, the re-creation of the Iraqi police enflamed further social, particularly sectarian based, divisions; members of the new Iraqi armed forces were recruited heavily from Shia Arabs, leading to civil commotions among the Sunni population of the country. Indeed, as political analyst James Defronzo has argued, the new military was often regarded as a "US equipped super Shia militia" (qtd. in Byman 604), thereby exacerbating tensions and divisions between the Shia and Sunni populations of Iraq.

As previously identified, political grievances and discriminatory measures both act as enabling factors in the development of terrorism. Indeed, the social divisions brought about in part by the process of de-Baathification, created sporadic phases of violence, which quickly snowballed into far-reaching insurgency. Initial resistance originated

from former government, military and intelligence officials. Newly-created insurgent organizations quickly emerged and found sympathy among the toppled ruling class, which had suffered both economically and politically. Much of the violence predominant among Sunni groups stemmed from nationalism and a sense of resentment over their loss of political and social influence. Acting as permissive factors for radicalization, these political grievances commenced to create an atmosphere in which democratization became far from attainable. Hence, by November 2003, the coalition had suffered more than one thousand attacks (Isakhan 42). Insurgent groups, headed by remaining members of the Baath Party or the Fedayeen Saddam Militia, which had increased its membership to 40000 by 2004, exacerbated the sociopolitical conditions in Iraq substantially (Katzmann 258). In the void created by the lack of an effective state, violence was omnipresent in both Shia and Sunni controlled areas. However, while the Sunni insurgency was often directed against the coalition, Shia violence was often internal, with authority often in the hands of local warlords, often associated with insurgent groups such as the Mahdi Army (Rock 121). The implications of these social conditions are multi-facetted; for on one side, rampant violence posed a major threat to stability and hindered political progress, one the other side however, sectarian divides also deepened with the rise of violence among both, the Sunni and Shia population. As historian Allawi has argued, "Baghdad saw several hundred revenge killings, many of which were Shia on Sunni" (qtd. in Isakhan 84). Revenge driven sentiments were certainly no matter of coincidence, considering the long-lasting suppression of the Shia by the Sunni in the Saddam era. However, the new emergence of violence added an additional dimension to a pre-existing conflict.

The upsurge of violence, which had its roots in sectarian divides and nationalist resentment of the foreign occupation, inhibited successful sociopolitical reconstruction

and the failure of which only enflamed new polarization and nationalist sentiments. The created vicious cycle itself was further exacerbated through public disillusionment (Byman and Pollack 61). In the wake of new security failures, underlined through radical insurgent attacks such as the Ramadan Offensive of October and November 2003, the public image of the coalition, foremost the United States began to suffer (64). As political analyst Anthony Shadid has noted, "the all powerful army" now had "a provocative presence" after the Ramadan Bombings of late 2003 (qtd in Agalday 35). The seeming inability of the coalition to create lasting security only fostered new grievances, which radicalized society further. As violence grew, prospects for democracy became increasingly dull. Nevertheless, it is to mention that multiple scholars have argued that the upsurge of violence and the coalition´s goal for democracy have not at all been contradictory. Historian Beetham has argued that, "imposing democracy from outside by force (…) is likely to fail" (448). Democratization in Iraq, which certainly was not the initial objective of the coalition, directing its attack primarily against the alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction by the Saddam State, was deemed to fail due to a lack of political legitimacy by the coalition. Beetham sees a "normative connection" between democracy and self-determination (446). In contrast to the principle´s application in the context of sovereignty, self-determination in the democratic state refers more to an internal, rather than external, means of expression. Thus, the invading power, which lacks electoral democratic legitimacy, takes on a public image of latent authoritarianism (450). In such circumstances, resistance is provoked, insecurity intensified, and mistrust becomes omnipresent. The situation only exacerbated when US economic interests were implemented by the coalition. The plan to privatize Iraq´s oil companies and allocate holdings to companies associated with the coalition only underlines this argument (Isakhan 91). Although reflective also of the US conception of

democracy, which comes inheritably with a free market economy, the plans for privatization played into the hands of the anti-foreign insurgent groups, thereby enflaming nationalist sentiments and fermenting deep social frustration. The memory of Iraq's past, marked by British control after its mandate over the county in 1921, certainly also exacerbated public grievances, with the invasion sparking new fears and causing a re-eruption of historical grievances.

As the insurgency developed, violence was increasingly expressed through sectarian approaches. By the summer of 2005, insurgent groups had claimed the lives of more than 250000 civilians (Lieberfield 20). Sectarian divides had been further exacerbated throughout the process of drafting Iraq's permanent constitution. For the creation and preservation of long-term political stability, a reconciliatory constitution was inevitable. However, sectarian divides proved to strain the process of constitutional drafting. The result was a document that aggravated the same sociopolitical divisions it sought to sooth. Undoubtedly, the Kurdish communities benefitted the most from the permanent constitution, with Article 117 substantiating the official recognition of the Regional Kurdish Government and perhaps most importantly, maintaining the "Kurdish veto" right to constitutional amendments (Brown 19). By giving the Kurds a loud political voice however, sectarian divides were only deepened and scholars such as Nathan Brown have therefore argued that "political sensibilities" were sharpened during the constitutional drafting process (26). Perhaps the most striking conclusion that can be drawn from the constitutional drafting process is that it not only failed to address the ideological peculiarities of Iraq, but it also paved the way for future political instability. Although scholars such as Hamoudi have often highlighted the positive effects of Iraq's imprecise constitution, allowing for future "constitutional construction" (qtd. in Isakhan 58), the most contentious issues were still not resolved. Thus, rather than unifying the

country and allowing for future sociopolitical discourse, the new constitution enabled new ideological and political conflicts. Subsequent to the ratification of the constitution in 2005 for example, the Kurds used textual ambiguities to expand their political influence, relying on the constitution to argue that any law passed by the Iraqi government would require Kurdish approval prior to its enactment in the region (Isakhan 58).

The exacerbation of political divides in the tumultuous years following the invasion have ultimately expressed themselves through violent insurgent groups, which commenced to take more organized and structured approaches. Radical Islamic insurgent groups had already existed in Iraq's political landscape, with organizations such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) having roots dating back to the year 1999 (Lister 64). However, political instability, as previously established, accelerates the growth of terrorist structures and it is thus no matter of coincidence that the AQI found increasing resonance in the aftermath of the coalition's occupation (Lieberfield 17). In a fragmented political landscape, AQI`s call for a unified "Islamic authority" (qtd. in Lieberfield 17) found a new political appeal. By January 2006, AQI was organized under a new terrorist umbrella organization, the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), which initially consisted of five other insurgent groups. By October 2006, the MSC was able to expand its political influence, with its size peeking at 300000 members. By the year 2006, the number of insurgent attacks in Iraq rose at about 100% per day, with approximately 2500 daily casualties (Isakhan 71). Many scholars have interpreted the rise in radical sectarian ideology as direct consequence of the 2003 invasion; for political analyst Hashim, the Sunni community regarded the US invasion as a "war against Islam", thus attempting to preserve alleged religious ideals in the violent struggle against the coalition (qtd. in Byman 638). While seeing the invasion as an

immediate spark to an insurgent outbreak, historian Fontan has emphasized more upon the role of opportunism among Islamic groups, arguing that the invasion became an opportunity for Al-Qaeda to "fight its supreme foe, the U.S", hence seizing the post-invasion momentum in Iraq to expand influence and gain political power (qtd. in Lister 91). Nevertheless, it should be remarked that the invasion did not only create political opportunities for radical insurgents, it also accelerated the growth of radical Islamic groups. The war in Iraq paved the way for a re-orientation of the movement, revitalizing jihadist ideology and enabling structural developments. Thus, it is no matter of coincidence that by October 2006, the MSC had re-formed itself into the Islamic State of Iraq, aiming to establish control over the Sunni majority areas of Iraq and becoming precedent to what is today known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Byman 638).

Conclusion

The effects of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq continue to shape the political landscape of today's world. Iraq is an illustrative case for miscalculated policies and failures often inherit to invasions. A lack of political legitimacy, of inclusionary political measures and of reconciliation in tumultuous times, all contributed to a fragmented society far from its democratic aspirations. In times were instability prevails, the rise of insurgency often becomes inevitable, particularly behind the façade of ideologies. In Iraq, a persisting power vacuum combined with social dissent and deep sectarian divides, created circumstances in which insurgency, particularly in the name of Islam, became predominant reality. The motivation behind terrorist groups has often been discussed within and beyond the scholarly sphere; however, no single factor can be isolated in the emergence of terrorism, and is thus rather a combination between sociopolitical instability and the zeal for revenge within the individual, that ultimately paves the way for terrorism. Particularly in light of the still tense situation within the country today, the lessons from Iraq plead the case for more political transparency, inclusiveness and reconciliation not through drastic implementations, but through gradual rapprochement.

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