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### A Bouquet of Biases

“We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail.” With words as emphatic as these, the 79% of Americans watching President George W Bush confidently address his fellow citizens in a successful attempt to sell the invasion of Iraq couldn’t help but be patriotically led along by the message of liberation. It seemed like a foolproof case. The Iraqi people had been oppressed, abused, and forgotten by the fascist dictator Saddam Hussien for the past 24 years, and what is America if not the iron fist of democracy? America has a long history of invading nations on the principles of “democracy,” and “freedom” of foreign nations. However, in the case of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, American invasion and subsequent occupation led to increased sectarian violence, and has left Iraq as a shell of a nation with little hope for the future.

The United States and Iraq have had a long history of relations, many of which provide crucial insight about the war in Iraq. Iraq had been entrenched in political turmoil since the 1950’s. Its leadership experienced continuous upheavals and instability, much of which was influenced by the United States and its deep seated fear of the domino theory. However, in 1968 a radical party that championed Arab unification, called the Ba’ath party, took control of the Iraqi government for good. A long time fervent member of the party and younger cousin to the

new president, Saddam Hussien was appointed to high levels of office that gave him almost a decade of control before his de jure succession to the Presidency in 1979. Initially, the United States tolerated, and even supported the new government. In the early 80s, the start of the Iran-Iraq war, the Reagan administration went as far as to back the Iraqis by giving them significant financial aid (though this was less because of the administration's affection for Iraq, and more because it saw the country as vital to halting Iranian expansionism). However, after the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1989, the image of a benign Iraq waned as Saddam began to show signs of aggression towards the critical, oil rich Kuwait. Despite President George H. W. Bush's attempts to dissuade Saddam by using the bliss of the post Iran-Iraq War honeymoon phase, in August of 1990, Saddam successfully invaded Kuwait in what is known as the First Persian Gulf War. What followed was a series of United States attacks that successfully pushed Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. The first Bush administration acted out of fear that Iraq would attempt to conquer Saudi Arabia next, effectively destroying the balance of wealth and power in the Middle East, and creating a risk of ruining the post-Cold War peace(Hahn). It is important to note that Bush strategically refrained from invading Iraq and deposing Saddam, fearing that it "would fragment his international alliance, exceed the mandate authorized by the United Nations, incur unacceptable U.S. casualties, and lead to a costly, prolonged occupation and instead(Hanh)," and instead opted for a containment policy. This policy of "aggressive containment," imposed by the allies, included a series of sanctions designed to restrict Iraq's military capabilities and protect its minorities. Most important was the United Nations sanction prohibiting Iraq from developing, possessing, or using chemical, nuclear, or biological weapons. To ensure Iraq was following the sanctions, the UN would routinely send officials to conduct "weapons checks." The weapons inspections proved to be fruitful, as inspectors found prohibited weapons and technology

throughout the country throughout the nineties. Finally, in 1998 during the Clinton administration, two key pieces of legislation were passed that laid the groundwork for the invasion that would take place five years later. The first was the Iraq Liberation Act which stipulated that it was official United States policy to support any attempts to remove Saddam Hussien. It would accomplish this by providing defense education, administering humanitarian assistance and, most importantly, intensifying support for democratic opposition groups to the regime(H.R.4655). It is important to note that this was by no means an authorization to invade Iraq but instead a firm declaration that the United States was against Saddam's regime and would support its overturning. The second piece of legislation was the Rumsfeld Commision. This legislation allowed former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld, former Deputy secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz, and others with a high profile platform to explore a variety of "doomsday scenarios" in which Iraq would possess nuclear weapons aimed at the US(Heilbrunn). Additionally, it established that the threat of a ballistic missile attack in the near future was very real. Both pieces of legislation reflect the change in attitude towards Iraq that was evident in American military action. That same year, the United States bombed Iraqi military installations in response to the country's continued interference with weapons inspections. This brief crisis ended in de-escalation as the sanctions eroded due to nations' need to trade with Iraq(Heilbrunn). However, shortly after tensions rose yet again, and in 2002 President George W. Bush proclaimed in a State of the Union address that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, were an "axis of evil...arming to threaten the peace of the world"(Frum). Bush added that "by seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger"(Frum). Bush's speech acknowledged the fear of terrorism that had entrenched Americans in the past year, jarring them out of the era of prosperity in which he was elected.

Chiefly, Bush affirmed that “states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil”(Frum). This affirmation demonstrated the lack of separation, in the Bush administration’s eyes, between individual terrorist groups and their governments, which became paramount in America’s post 9/11 foreign policy.

Fast forward two years. It is early 2003 and former Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Bush castigate Iraq for allegedly continuing to inhibit weapons inspections. Ignoring protests from other world leaders, such as the Chancellor of Germany and President of France, on March 17, 2003, Bush issues Saddam an ultimatum in an action that marks the end of attempting diplomacy: leave the country within 48 hours, or the U.S will launch an attack. But how did we get here? When I began my research I was hoping to find conclusions about why the United States invaded Iraq. I carried the hope that the answer lied in intricate foreign policy politics, or even malicious, power hungry politicians. I found no such absolute conclusions. Instead, I found a conglomeration of half truths, lies, and internal convictions thrown together amongst politicians. From what I have found, there were four main reasons that America had/used for invading Iraq. Some were hidden, and others were used to mobilize the public. Some were true, others were falsehoods.

The foremost reason for the invasion of Iraq was a lie. On February 5, 2003 U.S Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the U.N Security council in a speech that proclaimed that Iraq was, without a doubt, carrying weapons of mass destruction. He affirmed that this information was based on implicating maps and charts, incriminating photos, and telling recorded conversations between Iraqi officials(Mitchell). This was not only a clear violation of U.N sanctions, but, in the minds of Americans, also posed a great threat to security. The cold war had passed, but had nonetheless left a cloud of paranoia about another arms race and the

understanding of the fragility of mutually assured destruction in its wake. A year later, the Bush administration rescinded its claims about a stockpile of weapons. It instead admitted that after years of investigation, none were found. And in 2005, a presidential committee announced that there was “not one bit” of prewar intelligence that led officials to believe there were weapons in Iraq(Mitchell).

So if the government did not truly invade Iraq to commandeer the country’s arsenal, and only claimed as much as a facade, what were the actual reasons? One primary reason for the invasion, many stipulate, lies in oil control. The role of oil in the war in Iraq is possibly the most debated causation. Some conclude that oil control was the primary reason for the invasion, while others fervently deny that it had any role at all. Since the eighties, oil has been mostly traded through open markets(Britannica). Therefore, it is in nations’ best interests to boost their foreign influence as much as possible to encourage the cheap flow of oil. Fulfilling long time American fears, in 1972 Iraq nationalized the Iraq Petroleum Company’s(IPC) assets, effectively cutting of Western access. In addition, the U.S Energy Information Administration(EIA) estimated that about 90% of the country remained unexplored due to war and war and war sanctions (Longley). Toppling Hassan and instating a new regime could force Iraq to fully, and internationally, realize its oil potential(Lake). It is crucial to acknowledge that no matter how emphatically one might argue against oil’s role in the war, prior to the war, IPC was virtually cut off from Western markets. Compare that to now, the majority of the industry in Iraq is privatized and dominated by foreign companies(Juhasz). On the contrary, opponents of the oil theory, namely Bush and friends, assert that the invasion was impartial to oil greed. In what is one of the clearest and most definitive statements, whether true or not, in a very unclear war, Rumsfeld maintained that the invasion had “nothing to do with oil, literally nothing to do with oil”(Duffield).

This next motive is possibly the most agreed upon amidst the stark partisanship surrounding the war: 9/11, the terrorist attack by the Islamic extremist group Al-Qaida headed by the Saudi Osama Bin Laden. Pre 9/11, the conflict with Iraq seemed nothing more than unimportant background noise. That was until Bush unequivocally declared that Iraq had taken part in the attacks, much to the bafflement of the intelligence community. According to Bruce Riedel, who was in the room with Bush on September 14th, Bush made a call to Prime Minister Tony Blair where he revealed he was planning to “hit” Iraq soon(Riedel). In response, Blair pushed for more evidence, but Bush couldn’t provide any. No evidence was ever found to connect Saddam to 9/11, thus the claim is believed to be false. However 9/11 proved to be the perfect catalyst to use the conglomerate of reasons to catapult the U.S to war. Another hypothesis, relating to 9/11, is that the U.S felt that it needed to change the “geopolitical momentum.” 9/11 was a colossal intelligence failure, and Americans needed something positive, such as successfully overthrowing a dictator, to redirect their focus and rekindle their hopes in the government and military(Fisher).

Despite the number of reasons presented to take up arms against Iraq, a primary reason for invasion is still murky. The best explanation for the war is that there was none. It’s inconclusive. According to Max Fisher of *The New York Times*, the planning that resulted in the invasion was not led by White House subordinates conspiring to blatantly mislead the public. Instead individual actors were carrying out their own convictions to convince one another of their “readily available justifications.”

The war was supposed to be quick. Depose Saddam, establish an intern government, and leave heroes to both Americans and Iraqis. And though allied forces had taken control of Baghdad and sent Saddam and his Ba’ath allies into hiding by April 9, 2003, less than a month

after the invasion began, the last of U.S forces would not be pulled out until 2009(Britannica). But back in 2003, excitement was high as news of America's success spread. On May 1st, 2003, in an address given from the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, standing under a banner that definitively declared "Mission Accomplished," Bush proclaimed the war in Iraq as a completed and successful mission where a coalition of forces had freed Iraq from its tyrant(Lucey).

However, the triumphant hurrah of Bush's speech was a far cry from the realities unfolding in post- Hussein Iraq. The weeks following the "mission accomplished" proclamation were filled with chaos. Intense looting overtook the chaotic cities, and crime, both at the lower level of robberies and higher level of sectarian violence, precluded a conflict that was increasingly shaping up to be a civil war(Britannica). While the coalition of occupying forces attempted to establish an interim government, the Coalition Provisional Authority(CPA), U.S forces faced heavy resistance from insurgent groups. Resistance against occupying forces increased when Paul Bremer, leader of the CPA, disbanded Iraqi military and intelligence services, leaving more than 350,000 well armed soldiers without jobs(Nada). Before the overthrow of Saddam, both civilian deaths and soldier deaths had been relatively low. However, after May 1st, casualties skyrocketed. Particularly bloody battles include the first and second battles of Fallujah, in which deaths numbered in the thousands(Britannica). After years of conflict, finally, in November of 2008, a timeline was set for final withdrawal of US forces: troops would evacuate cities by 2009, and final withdrawal would be complete by mid 2009, ending the US occupation(Britannica).

It has been 20 years since the invasion of Iraq, and Americans are still divided about its outcome. According to a survey taken in 2019, 62% of Americans say that the fighting wasn't worth it (Doherty), and in Iraq, opinions are even more dismal. That being said, the invasion did result in a number of successes. First and foremost, the allied forces played a crucial role in the

overthrow of Saddam's regime, ending over two decades of ruthless Sunni control. At the time of the invasion, Saddam was in his late sixties, and if he had been able to successfully pass down power to his equally brutal sons, the regime might have lasted decades longer(Katz).

Additionally, in contrast to the tight control over media and outright suppression and murder of opponents, Iraqis today enjoy a comparatively much freer society than under Saddam: a largely free press and multiple outspoken political factions. Moreover, the forceful expulsion of Hussein from office curtailed the suffering of Kurds in Northern Iraq(Katz). In the late eighties an ethnic cleansing was carried out by Hassan's cousin, appointed secretary general, Ali Hassan Al Majid. Kurds were forced to move into designated areas, and from there were transported out to desolate areas and mass murdered by machine guns and gas. As many as 100,000 were killed(Power). During the dictator's regime, the Kurds were seen as dangerous insurgents who demanded extermination. Today, while old biases do still linger, they have gained a voice in government. Lastly, through the allied framework, Iraq has been able to maintain mostly free elections which has allowed the majority Shia population to attain political influence.

The end of Saddam's regime offered hope. Iraq was not only rich, but now also free, in theory allowing it to prosper. However the prospect of a prosperous Iraq remains unfilled. Iraqis are all too aware that their country sits on a goldmine, and at first the prospect of tapping into this wealth gave the country a renewed hope. Unfortunately, the wealth from oil in Iraq has not been successfully utilized, and therefore, not realized at an individual level. Instead, money has been lost to corruption or ambitious, unfinished, public works projects, leaving little left for public infrastructure or social services(Rubin). The failures to rebuild a new Iraq are apparent, as daily Iraqi life is rampant with challenges, leaving a new generation agitated and unhappy. This new generation of Iraqis has grown up amidst the violence that followed the invasion and



disappointment of unfulfilled hopes. Almost one half of the Iraqi population was born after 2000 and never experienced life under Hussien. Additionally, according to the World Bank, one in three young people in Iraq are jobless(Rubin). As the years since the deposition of Saddam continue to fade, so do the memories of hope of improvement for a destroyed nation.

Secondly, the sudden exit of a man who had been in power for so long created a power vacuum that the United States had been ill prepared to fill. As a result, foreign nations saw Iraq as an advantageous opportunity to spread their influence. One of the most influential groups came not from Iraq, but from its enemy, Iran. Taking advantage of the upheaval, Tehran worked tirelessly to exert control over Iraqi politics. According to a *New York Times* article, leaked Iranian intelligence documents detail “years of painstaking work by Iranian spies to co-opt the country’s leaders, pay Iraqi agents working for the Americans to switch sides and infiltrate every aspect of Iraq’s political, economic and religious life”(Arango). These documents, mainly written between 2014 and 2015, were written by members of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security who were based in Iraq, and divulge how Iran fomented such close relationships with Iraqi leaders, including former Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi. In many ways, Iraq has become a puppet state for its enemy. Recently, freedoms that had been granted to Iraqis after 2003 have been curtailed by Shi’ite parties connected to Iran(Arango).

Though the United States lacked important foresight in the rebuilding of a divided Iraq, the country did attempt to construct a new Iraq on the foundation of democracy and equity. These principles were founded in the transitional government, called the Coalition Provisional Authority. The new government attempted to rebuild Iraqi society through a list of orders, one of which included privatizing Iraq’s economy. While unproblematic in theory, since the provisional government sought to divide power between Kurdish, Sunnis, and Shia, tensions between these

groups were exacerbated(Rubin). Saddam Hussien and his group of ruling elites were part of a Sunni minority that had oppressed both the Shia majority and the Kurdish minority. When Saddam's government was overthrown, the social order was upended and new authority diminished the power of Sunnis. What the allies did not expect, at least in such great strength, was the unshakable Sunni fervor and resistance against American occupation. What was initially a group led by former military and intelligence officers of the old government and made up of loyalists, soon became conjoined with the Islamic extremist group Al Qaeda(Rubin). In response to Sunni violence, Shia created their own militant groups. And although the fighting has largely halted since, the factions still remain, especially the Shia militias that hold power today(Rubin). Thus, what was originally resistance to American occupation morphed into sectarian violence that signaled a civil war.

The Iraq that exists today is a stranger to the vision Iraqis and Americans dreamt up for the newly freed nation. Whatever reasons were used by Americans to warrant the invasion in Iraq, our country did have a vested interest in maintaining social and political order, both to exert oil control and to create an image of American philanthropy, the occupation in Iraq was a failure. I say this understanding that the clear goal presented to the public was to depose Saddam, which was successfully achieved in a little over a month. However, although no longer under authoritarian rule, most Iraqis still live in poverty in an extremely corrupt country where their voices and needs seem to mean little. In effect, Iraq is not that much better off than it was under Saddam, and no emphatic speeches or grand promises change that truth.

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