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Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin |

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\*Corresponding author: Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin, Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, Durham, UK & Centre for Research in History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia  
E-mail: [mohammed.i.saidin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:mohammed.i.saidin@durham.ac.uk)

Reviewing editor:  
Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, History and Political Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology College of Arts and Social Science, Ghana

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## HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# US foreign policy, neo-conservatism and the Iraq war (2003-2011): Critical reviews of factors and rationales

Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** The post-US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has witnessed a dramatic change in the Iraqi political landscape and became the main highlights of geopolitical and security issues in the Middle East. Critics of the war maintained that there were other motives behind the decision of the US government to invade Iraq. This article argues that the US administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was not entirely driven by the desire to introduce democracy and establish security, dubbed the "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in the country, as justified by President Bush, but instead motivated largely by oil-related benefits to the US including its interest to gain control of the oil reserves in Iraq as well as to preserve the US Dollars as the world reserve currency. This factor is supplemented by several other rationales, including the neoconservatives' influence to bring a regime change in Iraq and the quest for US global hegemony. These three major factors—oil resources, the position of petrodollar's status quo, and the quest for global hegemony make up a comprehensive and sophisticated motivation to justify why the US administration decided to invade Iraq in 2003, apart from the terrorism and weapon of mass destruction-related issues.

**Subjects:** Middle East Politics; Politics; History

**Keywords:** 2003 invasion; United States; Iraq war; oil reserves; global hegemony

## 1. Introduction

The Iraq War 2003 is widely perceived as the most controversial foreign policy and decision-making ever by the US government and Bush administration throughout the modern international relations history. The reasons for the invasion have invited diverse theories and opinions from analysts, scholars, and politicians worldwide. They appear to be divided over the justifications of the war as announced by the US state officials on the Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and Saddam Hussein's link to Al-Qaeda terrorists that was responsible for

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin is Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University UK, and Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the Centre for History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. He is also an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Social Sciences and International Studies, University of Exeter. He received his PhD in Middle East Politics from the University of Exeter, United Kingdom in 2018. His research interest focuses on the area of Middle East and North Africa, Arab Spring, Political Islam and Muslim Affairs. He is the author of the book, "The Arab Uprisings and Malaysia's Islamist Movements: Influence, Impact and Lessons" (Routledge, Taylor, and Francis 2020), which is the first in-depth analysis of the Arab Uprisings' implications from the perspective of Islamist movements in Malaysia and Tunisia.

the 9/11 attacks. Critics of the war maintained that there were other rationales and significant factors behind the decision of the US government to invade Baghdad and topple the long-serving dictator of Saddam's regime. Prior to the 2003 invasion, the US government had repeatedly convinced the Congress and the American people that the WMD activities in Iraq have threatened the United States national security. On 18 March 2003, in President Bush ultimatum speech in the White House, he addressed that Iraq remains a threat to national security and the government is responsible to protect its people as well as political and economic interests:

Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised. This regime has already used weapons of mass destruction against Iraq's neighbours and against Iraq's people. Recognizing the threat to our country, the United States Congress voted overwhelmingly last year to support the use of force against Iraq (Bush, 2003a).

However, since after the war, it has been exposed that the allegations on Iraq WMD capabilities proved to be hollow and no WMD have been found in Iraq. Following that, the US supplemented the decision to go to war with Iraq with the claim to promote democracy in the Middle East and also to end Saddam Hussein's authoritarian rule and human right abuses. What was missing from these motives is the discussion of oil and its possible benefits to the US and its allies. Nothing official from the President, the White House, or US officials contained any mention of oil. Despite this, critics of the war argued that the invasion was driven mainly by the interest to gain control of Iraq's substantial oil reserves.

To date, there is no single-factor explanation would be able to justify the Iraq invasion. What seems the case is that the Iraq war driven by different motives with different strategic priorities. It appears that the US foreign policy under the leadership of President George W. Bush, has undergone drastic transformation, shifting from its moderation and defensive strategies to protect the US status quo into an aggressive strategy by utilising its military strength to protect its interest and ideals (Yordan, 2006). Considering this policy transformation, why did the US foreign policy changes after President Bush came into power, and disregard the traditional foreign policy under President Clinton? Why did the Bush Government decide to invade Iraq? Looking at the question, this paper critically argues that while oil plays a significant motive for Iraq invasion, the decision was also affected by other factors that are intertwined together.

## 2. Methodology

My arguments are established based on two main qualitative approaches. First, I employ the method of retrospective case studies, which involved the collection of data relating to a past event—as in this case the Iraq invasion of 2003. This paper looks back on critical reasons for the US regime's decision to invade Iraq, in its historical integrity. The use of case study is important for this paper to developing different views of historical reality, including the awareness that a state behaviour can be merely understood as an act that is driven by the perspectives of international relations theories and largely influenced by national interests. Secondly, the use of extensive library research and document analysis, primarily via published available sources such as official reports, academic articles and books, expert opinions and online news have also been utilised in this paper to obtain extensive information on the US foreign policy under Bush presidency, neo-conservatism, US–Iraq oil trade, and the polemics of counter-terrorism and democracy promotion in Iraq. To demonstrate this, the first section of this paper reviews the Bush Doctrine and establish the connection between the neo-conservative approaches to the US foreign policy during President Bush's era. The second section discusses on the importance of Gulf oil to the US and its allies and US desire to control the oil markets. The final section deliberates on the grand strategy of the US government to undertake global hegemony. It concludes on the importance of the Iraq war as a radical change in the history of US foreign policy.

### 3. Neo-conservatism and the Bush Doctrine

Neo-conservatism is a political movement that began in the 1960s in the US among conservative-leaning Democrats dissatisfied with the party's foreign policy. The term "neo-conservative" refers to individuals who have made the ideological transition from the anti-Stalinist Left to the camp of American conservatism. Neoconservatives typically advocate for the advancement of democracy and the American national interest in international affairs, including military force. In addition, they are known for their contempt for communism and political radicalism (McGlinchey, 2009). Neoconservatives share the classical realist perspective that war and conflict are ultimately motivated by man's desire for self-preservation, competition, vainglory, and universal recognition. However, neoconservatives insist that these natural impulses are nurtured, mediated, and channelled through historically evolving institutions, ideology, and cultural norms, almost in a thin constructivist manner (Drolet, 2010).

The neo-conservatives' outlook of American foreign policy, which is essentially, the Bush Doctrine, underpinned the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and topple Saddam Hussein. They embrace a liberal theory of international relations and believe in the concept of advancing American national interest with universal moral principles and values (Lieberfeld, 2005; Schmidt & Williams, 2008). The Bush Doctrine holds the belief that the US is the sole superpower and seeks to maintain its hegemonic position. In his speech at West Point in 2002, prior to the invasion, President Bush remarked that "America has and intends to keep military strengths beyond challenge. Thereby making the destabilizing arm races of other eras pointless and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace" (Bush, 2002a). During his leadership, he declared that the US will maintain its defences beyond challenge, and to keep its armed forces strong enough to stop any potential adversaries. The neo-conservatives believe that American leadership is needed to maintain an orderly and peaceful world.

According to Fukuyama (2006; as cited in Schmidt & Williams, 2008), neo-conservatives' influence in the Bush administration had steered the US response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the direction of Iraq invasion. The situation in Iraq also worsened at the same time, providing reasons for US interference. The neo-conservatives were displeased with the outcome of the Gulf War in 1991 and exploited the war on terror and their positions within the government to influence for the use of military intervention and capabilities to remove Saddam Hussein from power and overthrow the Baathist regime.

Another credible explanation provided by the neo-conservatives for Iraq invasion is the desire to influence Middle East countries to accept the pro-western camp. John Mearsheimer argues that neoconservatives "believe that international politics operate according to 'bandwagoning' logic" (Mearsheimer, 2005; as cited in Schmidt & Williams, 2008). According to this logic, weaker states will join the bandwagon of the stronger states, and in this case, Iraq will join on the US bandwagon. For Robert Kagan and William Kristol, should Iraq and Turkey, two of the three most important Middle Eastern powers support the pro-western camp, there is a reasonable chance that other small states will follow to join in the US bandwagon (Kagan & Kristol, 2003; as cited in Schmidt & Williams, 2008).

Neo-conservatives' think tank, PNAC, which members included influential conservatives, including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz, wrote an open letter urging President Clinton to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein in 1998 (Project for a New American Century, 1998). According to the neoconservatives, it was almost certain that Saddam would acquire the capability to deliver WMD, risking America, its allies and oil supplies. The neoconservatives, especially Dick Cheney, repeatedly linked 9/11 terrorist attacks to Iraq (Schmidt & Williams, 2008). They argued that Saddam Hussein could not be deterred or contained from using Iraq's alleged WMD. However, the fact that PNAC were proposing to transform Clinton's foreign policy even before the 9/11 attacks, shows that they were interested in a regime change in Iraq as part of an earlier agenda.

PNAC also sent an open letter to President Bush after the 9/11 attacks, advocating “must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq” or essentially, a regime change (Project for a New American Century, 2001). The letter warrants for the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, despite “even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack”. With the fear of 9/11 coupled with a half-baked strategic plan, the neoconservatives led the US to go into war with Iraq as a preventive move (Schmidt & Williams, 2008). Following the 9/11 attacks and the fear that ensues after the attacks, President Bush declared that it is necessary to eliminate threats from rogue states and terrorists armed with WMD (The White House, 2002). With the presence of multiple PNAC members in the Bush administration, it came to no surprise that the neoconservatives have a significant influence on the American decision to invade Iraq.

Nevertheless, the Iraq invasion did not proceed as the proponents of neoconservative had expected, emphasizing the intelligence failures prior to the war and the dismissal of the local context and geopolitical significance of the invasion as two major reasons as to why neoconservatism influence on Operation Iraqi Freedom did not thrive. First, for the neocons, the perceived military success in Afghanistan was the catalyst for arguing to extend the War on Terror to overthrowing Saddam Hussein in Iraq. According to Rogers (2008), despite growing international concern about political and security issues in the Middle East and there was momentous worldwide disagreement to a further American invasion, the Bush administration was determined to build on the momentum of the previous invasion in Afghanistan and began to strategise for regime change in Iraq. In the words of Corscadden (2014), there was a consensus among the neocons that Iraq could potentially threaten international stability through its alleged proliferation of WMD's, but the divide still remained over the rational acts to deal with this impending problem. For the neocons, there was only one course of action and the lack of a UNSC resolution on the Iraq case was not going to change their policies. Secondly, the neocons are seen to have misjudged and underestimated the sentiments of Iraqi nationalism and the strength of sectarianistic feelings amongst Shia communities as it was largely assumed they would support US occupation during the post-Saddam's regime. By over-simplifying the political landscape in Iraq prior to the invasion, the neocons within the US foreign policy relentlessly underestimated the “tribalistic” nature of the country. As Corscadden (2014) has pointed out, the US intelligence via the roles of neoconservative figures utterly mischaracterised how divided the Iraqi society, stemming from decades of colonisation, autocratic rules, and deeply rooted religious and sectarian conflicts.

#### **4. War against terrorism or war for oil? The importance of Gulf Oil to the US**

Many argue that the main driver behind the Iraq invasion was to control Iraq's oil reserves (Hinnebusch, 2007a). It could not be a coincidence that the second-largest oil reserves in the Middle East with no proven WMD activities and a no-threat to the US was targeted by the US military. If Iraq's potential WMD capabilities and Saddam Hussein human right abuses were the motivation for the invasion, it is surprising that there are other rogue states with the potential to acquire WMD and states with massive human right abuses were spared from the US intervention. Michael Klare, an analyst of oil politics noted that:

No doubt many factors are involved—some strategic, some political, and some economic. But it is hard to believe that US leaders would contemplate such an extreme act without very powerful motives—and the pursuit of oil has long constituted the most commanding motive for US military action in the Persian Gulf region (Klare, 2002).

During December 2002, the US government imported 11.3 million barrels of oil from Iraq. In 2003, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) has projected that the demand for oils will increase in the coming decades. According to EIA projections, the global demand for oil would increase from 77.1 million barrels per day (MMBD) in 2001 to 118.8 MMBD by 2025 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2003; as cited in Duffield, 2005). EIA also predicted that the net oil imports of the US and its trading partners in Europe and Asia would grow and double by 2025. Just prior to the Iraq war, the statistics shows that the US consumed approximately 19.7 million MMBD,

of which 53% of the amount were imported (Duffield, 2005). Table 1 below summarises the statistical figures of US imports of Iraqi crude oil and petroleum products for the past two decades, from 1998 to 2018.

How does this scenario related to Persian oils? The importance of the Persian Gulf in the EIA projections lies within the fact that nearly two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves lie in the region. In 2002, Saudi Arabia has one-fourth of the oil reserves, which amounts to 262 billion barrels, Iraq came second with 112.5 billion barrels (11%), while Kuwait, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates each has 9.2%, 8.6%, and 9.3% oil reserves, respectively (BP; as cited in Duffield, 2005). And in 2002, 41.4% of world oil exports already originated from the Middle East (BP; as cited in Duffield, 2005). Whether it specifically drove the U.S. invasion or not, oil has long played a key role in the formulation of America's foreign policy as it applies to military, political, and economic intervention.

Duffield (2005) argues that there is a strong motive for the invasion in which the US could have expected to benefit. Firstly, the elimination of Saddam Hussein could end Iraq's long stranding threats to dominate the vast oil resources in the Gulf region. Secondly, access to Iraq's oil reserves would increase oil production and therefore increase the stability of the world oil markets in the medium to long term. As the oil market price is controlled by supply and demands, oil-importing countries, including the US, is vulnerable to the oil supply interruptions whenever they may occur. It is in the interest of the US to ensure that the supply remains high to bring down the price of world oil markets and ensure a stable oil production for its consumption and its allies.

**Table 1. United States imports from Iraq of crude oil and petroleum products (1998–2018)**

Year	Thousand Barrels
2018	190,108
2017	220,499
2016	155,122
2015	83,726
2014	134,642
2013	124,403
2012	174,080
2011	167,690
2010	151,619
2009	164,357
2008	229,300
2007	176,709
2006	201,866
2005	193,987
2004	240,191
2003	175,663
2002	167,638
2001	289,998
2000	226,804
1999	264,764
1998	122,518

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration (



## 5. Preserving the status quo: Control of oil supply and threat to the Dollars

With the huge oil reserves contained in the Persian Gulf, it comes as no surprise that the main goal of the US National Security Strategy (NSS) since World War II, and since 1970s, is to guarantee access to Gulf oil for the US and its allies. During President Carter administration, he regarded the Gulf area with its oil fields as one of the vital interests to the US and any foreign attempts to gain control of these oil fields would be repelled by the use of any means necessary, including military force (Smith, 1980). While the announcement was made as a response towards the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, an external power control of the oil supplies in the region would lead to a possible exploitation of the oil market and increase in oil prices, or to exert political pressure, which would be detrimental to the US.

In particular, Iraq was targeted by the US compared to other Persian Gulf countries due to the discovery of its giant and supergiant fields, which remain undeveloped. Duffield (2005) noted that there is a high possibility of further discoveries, with 90% of the country yet to be explored. He also highlighted that Iraqi oil is close to the surface, making it easily accessible with lower production costs. With the vast amount of oil, Saddam Hussein attempts to manipulate the resources for political advantage by temporarily suspending oil exports to exert pressure on the US (MacFarquhar, 2002; as cited in Duffield, 2005). Robert Longley, a US government and history expert further claims that:

While its proven oil reserves of 112 billion barrels ranked Iraq second in the world behind Saudi Arabia, EIA estimated that up to 90-percent of the country remained unexplored due to years of wars and sanctions. Unexplored regions of Iraq, the EIA estimated, could have yielded an additional 100 billion barrels. Iraq's oil production costs were among the lowest in the world. However, only about 2,000 wells had been drilled in Iraq, compared to about 1 million wells in Texas alone (Longley, 2021).

Controlling Iraq's oil reserves would guarantee the US and its people access to cheap oil and its corporations to billions of petrodollars. John Judis (2006; as cited in Hinnebusch, 2007a) highlighted that the neoconservatives believe that controlling Iraq would weaken the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) fatally and the presence of the US military would prevent Iraqi oil industry from being wrenched from the US. In addition, the US intends to liberalise Iraq oil by increasing investment and development of Iraqi oil fields, and hence increasing its supply to external markets (Bonds, 2013). Bonds (2013) also highlighted that a declassified planning documents of the US administration indicated that officials were interested in reshaping the Iraqi oil industry. He stressed that numerous reports were made to restructure Iraq's political and economic landscapes, including the oil sector. In this view, one report advocated for a radical restructuring of the oil sector to increase rates of production, and this could only be achieved through privatisation of the oil industry. As the logic implies, an increase in oil production would lower global oil prices in the US and the world.

Among other example of US interests in Iraq oil can be seen from the Project for the New American Century's (Project for a New American Century, 1998) letter to President Clinton. The letter called for the removal of Saddam Hussein through military intervention "to protect our vital interest in the Gulf" (1998). The letter implies that the neoconservatives have so much interest in a regime change in Iraq, to protect "significant portion of the world's supply of oil" (Project for a New American Century, 1998). In order to gain unlimited access to Iraq oil, it became apparent that the quickest way to achieve this ambition is to remove Saddam Hussein from power (Duffield, 2005). The removal of Saddam Hussein could also assist Iraq to emerge as the new oil ally to the US, replacing Saudi Arabia as an important player in the petroleum market, due to the US dissatisfaction with the Saudi relationship.

This article also argues that another credible reason for Iraq invasion was to preserve the US Dollars as the world's reserve currency, therefore maintaining the US global hegemony. The US

Dollars has been the currency for oil trading and transactions, but its value is threatened by the emerging Euro as a competitive currency. In order to protect the Dollars, the US embarked on a battle to control the oil-producing countries and the manner in which these oils are sold. In the 1970s, the US made a deal with Saudi Arabia for Saudi oils to be traded only in US Dollars and for Saudi to invest its surplus oil proceeds in US debt securities, in return to guaranteed protection from Israel, military aid and US weapons. The same arrangement was joined in by other oil-producing countries of OPEC a few years later, after seeing the benefits enjoyed by Saudi Arabia from its deal with the US, creating artificial demands for Dollars and for the US treasuries. Pricing oils in Dollars also ensured that the US could protect the Dollar from the growing strengths of other currencies in Western Europe and Japan (Kubusi & Mansur, 1994; as cited in Shipley, 2007; Robinson, 2012).

For countries that do not have their own free oil, they are not left with many options, except to buy oil as their source of energy. As OPEC oils are traded in Dollars only, other oil-importing countries are forced to hold huge sums of Dollars in reserve. Through this system, the Dollar becomes a sought-after commodity and the US government are able to print money at a low cost and selling them at a high value. This condition allows the US to cover its huge trading deficit, used to fund tax cuts and military expenditure for the Iraq war (Chapman, 2004). In October 2000, Saddam Hussein mooted to price Iraq oil in Euros and dissociated himself from the Dollar. Despite the traditional practice in OPEC of trading oil in Dollars, Iraq began selling its oil, for the new Euro currency, under the United Nation (U.N.) Oil-for-Food Program (United Nation, 2003; as cited in Shipley, 2007). This angered the US, causing an abrupt change in the US position on Saddam Hussein. At the same time, there was a rapid growth in the value of Euro against the Dollar, and the switch to Euro resulted in positive gains for Iraq. The success then encouraged other OPEC nations to consider switching to Euro as well, which would be detrimental to the Dollar (Shipley, 2007).

In 2002, the value of the Dollar sunk 17% against the Euro, providing even greater reason for oil-producing countries to consider converting to Euro-dominated sales (Clark, 2004). Should this materialises, it would translate into a huge change in the international trade, as Dollar-dominated oil sales are important to preserve the Dollar position as the reserve currency. The switch from oil trading from Dollar to Euro would lead to plummeting Dollar and potentially collapsing the US economy. Clark (2004) highlighted that under this condition, the Dollar would crash anywhere between the values of 20% to 40%. In addition, Iran has also proposed to price its oil in Euro and has moved to shift the majority of its reserve funds from Dollar to Euros in 2002. Encouraged by the economic success the Euro brought to Iraq, Iranian economists had been pushing the country towards the Euro (Shipley, 2007). While Iraq has been the only OPEC country that has switched to Euro and abandoned the Dollar, the US feared that the trend would continue in Iran and spread to other OPEC countries. Thus, the US took a bold step to send a message to Saddam Hussein and oil-producing countries that it will not allow the switching to Euro to happen (Shipley, 2007). In order to prevent OPEC from switching oil trading to Euro, the Iraq war was initiated as a pre-empt move by the US to gain geostrategic control over Iraq,

#### **6. Rethinking other motives: Defeat terrorism and the polemics of Iraq's "WMD"?**

Regarding the issues of terrorism and religious radicalism, Iraq is one of the seven countries identified by the Bush administration as a state sponsor of international terrorist activism (The White House, n.d.). The US government argues that the establishment of Iraq as a democratic country will lead to stability in the region, as democratic countries do not harbour terrorists and do not fight with each other. Bush insisted that democracy in Iraq will serve as an antidote to terrorism in Middle East region. A democratic Iraq would indirectly result in the removal of terrorist threats that was argued to emanate from Baghdad (Schmidt & Williams, 2008). The Bush administration believed that Saddam Hussein sponsors terrorism, and by toppling his regime, it could eliminate jihadist terrorism and send a strong message to other rogue states that the US is willing to eliminate any threats before they materialised.



Two of the major motivations of the Bush administration for the Iraq invasion were Saddam Hussein's alleged links to terrorists and the perceived production of WMD by Iraq. In many of President Bush's speeches and statements of the White House, the US government made repeated knowledge of the WMD being developed and possessed by Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Secretary of State Colin Powell also presented a report to the U.N. in 2003 to prove Iraq's possession of WMD (CNN, 2003). In addition, US officials also claimed that Saddam Hussein had links with Al-Qaeda, who was responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thus, it is no surprise that the 2002 NSS document declared on deterring and defending the country against terrorist threats posed by rogue states. The document outlined that "we must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends. ... We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed" (The White House, 2002, p. 14).

According to The White House (n.d.), the Bush administration claimed that Saddam Hussein violates the U.N. Security Council Resolution that prohibits him from supporting terrorists or allowing terrorists to operate in Iraq. It was believed that he provided headquarters, operating bases, training camps and other means of support to terrorist groups in Turkey, Iran, and Palestine, including the Palestine Liberal Front and Abu Nidal Organisation. US officials also claimed that Saddam Hussein offers a generous amount of money to families of Palestinian suicide/homicide bombers.

#### **7. "The good, the bad and the ugly": The quest for US global hegemony and the paradox of democracy promotion in Iraq**

Great powers pursue global hegemony to increase their security and freedom of actions. In line with this, the post 9/11 US foreign policy had focused on global level to spread the US hegemony and influence in the international system. The US spreads its hegemony by "imposing" and spreads an ideology, in this case, liberal democracy. Offensive realists argue that great powers are "always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal" (Mearsheimer, 2001, pg. 29; as cited in Yordan, 2006). According to Yordan (2006), it is in this vein that the Iraq war was pursued, in the effort to re-establish and spread American pre-eminence in the Middle East region. Prior to the Bush administration, the US foreign policy under the leadership of President Clinton has been moderate, focusing on defensive strategies to protect its status quo. For many in the Bush administration, Clinton's policies had weakened the US relative position in the world (Yordan 2006). Thus, neoconservatives in the Bush administration played a role to influence those in the system to transform American foreign policy, to employ the nation's capabilities to refashion the world according to US interests and ideals.

The PNAC, driven by the neo-conservatives has highlighted on the grand strategy of the US government to undertake global hegemony, and pursue efforts to advance this goal during the Bush administration. PNAC's founding Statement of Principles has outlined the need to rally support for "American global leadership" as well as "responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order" (Project for a New American Century, 1997). As the Bush administration was largely influenced by the neoconservatives, the 2002 NSS document also echoes same vision. According to Hinnebusch (2007b), the document called for "full spectrum of dominance" by assuming leadership to create a balance of power, combat terrorism, engage in preventive wars, and reshape the Middle East, which will ultimately strengthen the US hegemony.

The Bush government also sought to promote democracy in the Middle East region, using it as a tool to strengthen the US global hegemony and protect its interests and values. It was widely reported in the media that the US plans to use Iraq as a launching pad to promote democracy in West Asia. During President Bush remarks at the National Endowment for Democracy in 2003, he remarked that democracy promotion in Iraq is a "strategy freedom in the Middle East" and that "failure of Iraqi democracy would embolden terrorists around the world, increase dangers to the American people" (Bush, 2003b). The need to promote democracy in Iraq is driven by the

responsibility of the US to install peace in Iraq. Termed as “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the US sets its ambition to end Saddam Hussein’s long autocratic rule and human rights abuses. US officials believe that democracy will bloom in Iraq with the removal of Saddam Hussein and his regime (Schmidt & Williams, 2008).

In the eyes of the US government, Saddam Hussein’s rule over Iraq is characterized by the unprecedented use of violence, terror, and intelligence as a way to eliminate resistance and criticisms, as well as to instil obedience among its populace. Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a great case example for what an extremely repressive autocracy would present. However, it cannot be discounted that under Saddam’s rule, there was economic prosperity in Iraq as the country GDP per capita took off from \$382 in 1972 to \$2,726 in 1979 (Dawisha, 2009, p. 219). Saddam was also concerned with the needs of the less privileged and with lessening the gap between the rich and the poor by providing his citizens with free education and health care. However, his policies in the fields of economy and social should not be the reason that Saddam is shielded from criticisms nor his subjects barred from having the freedom of choice and the freedom of opinion.

Saddam Hussein’s decision to lead Iraq in an extremely autocratic manner can be attributed to several factors. For one, Saddam is known to idealize the Soviet Union leader, Joseph Stalin and before becoming President, Saddam had been one of the conspirators in the 1968 coup d’etat. In a completely Soviet Union fashion, Saddam had purged the Ba’ath Party of potential threats in the years leading up to his ascendancy in the 1970s, accusing them of real or imagined plots against the government (Dawisha, 2009, p. 214). This was on top of the fact that Saddam was anything but invisible by taking part in a number of important Iraqi international policies and decisions, such as the negotiation with France for a nuclear research reactor in 1975–76 (Dawisha, 2009, p. 213). It can be deduced that Saddam had always been one who is eager to consolidate power and his rise to power as the premier of Iraq was not one that happened overnight, but was a highly organized effort. By the time he became President, the Ba’ath Party was filled with his loyalists and those who eyed his position were nipped at the bud. Saddam was then able to keep the power he consolidated for the next 24 years with the autocratic regime he presided over, taking cues from the Soviet Union led by Joseph Stalin.

Thus, for Bush administration, the policy to spread democracy and against authoritarianism in the Middle East, with specific attention to Iraq is well defended in the US 2002 NSS and 2006 NSS documents. The US reaffirmed the importance to promote democracy as it represents America’s ultimate values that people of multi-ethnic, multi-heritages and multi-faiths can live and prosper in peace; represents the blueprint for success for other countries and expand their circle of development; and help secure American interests through a stable political environment (The White House, 2002). The documents urged democracy promotion in all parts of the world through any necessary means to protect the US interests and to create a stable political environment and eliminate the territory of terrorists.

In line with this, the Bush administration initiated several initiatives to support Iraq’s transition to democracy to complement its military intervention. The US created an internal consensual domination mechanism structure where the dominant class dominates certain elements within political and civic societies to assume control, cultivate the political and civic societies, cultivate Iraq’s economy through privatisation, appoint “agents of influence” to take the lead in the government to integrate Iraq into global capitalism, build a society that supports the new Iraq government, fund local media to spread propaganda issues and suppress alternate political voices or radical groups (W. I. Robinson, 2004). Bush believes that democracy would have a snowball effect—the first Arab country to establish a democratic government would become a role model to neighbouring countries in the Middle East (Pressman, 2009). This would lead toward a wave of democratization across the region, which will then integrate the Middle East into the world

economic system, build a strong civil society and prevent the rise of regional power, as well as promote stability and hence protect American interests (W. I. Robinson, 2004).

## 8. Conclusion and perspectives

The Iraq war does represent a significant change in the US foreign policy. The core of the American foreign policy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks has focused on protecting its national security by fighting terrorism. Guided by the Bush Doctrine, the Bush administration argued that Iraq invasion was necessary to eliminate threats to the US national security by Iraq's development of WMD and Saddam Hussein's support for Al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Following the Iraq war, it was proven that the US motivations for the Iraq war were hollow. In fact, the 9/11 terrorist attacks provided opportunities for the Bush administration to refashion American foreign policy and reorder the world according to American interests and ideals. With regard to transformation in American foreign policy, the Iraq war constitutes a radical change to remake the Middle East, as the region emerges to be seen as problematic and responsible for 9/11. The Bush administration concluded that 9/11 is just a small part of the larger problems in the Middle East, hence the change in the rationale of the Iraq war later—to install democracy in the Middle East and to end the root cause of terrorism and human rights abuses. The Bush administration believes that without intervention from the US, the security situation in the Middle East would deteriorate even further and threatens US national security.

Regardless of why the US decided to invade Iraq, the American and Iraq people have certainly paid a huge price for the change. The US had spent a significant amount of financial and human resources to ensure victory in the Iraq war. But at the end of the day, the overall impact of the war is not justified. Despite the rationales provided by the US and the motivations argued by Iraq war critics, the US failed to transform Iraq and achieve its original intention. If Iraq was invaded for oil, the US failed to secure its prize. The winners of the first post-Iraq war concessions of oil in 2009 were Norway, France, China, and Russia. Of the 11 contracts awarded, only one went to a US company, Exxon Mobil. If Iraq was invaded to spread democracy in the Middle East, it failed to cause ripple effects to neighbouring states, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. It has neither stability nor influence and on top of it, the US has not only failed, but made weaker through its involvement in Iraq. If Iraq was invaded to defeat terrorism and Al-Qaeda, it certainly was not contained. ISIS emerged from the ashes of Al-Qaeda following the invasion. The political landscape in the Middle East could have formed differently without the invasion. The Iraq war has clearly shifted the American foreign policy and left a deep imprint on American intervention policy.

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### Author details

Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [mohammed.i.saidin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:mohammed.i.saidin@durham.ac.uk)

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3069-8206>

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, Durham, UK & Centre for Research in History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.

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