

A Case Against the Iraq War

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Overview

Throughout the annals of United States history, there have been few instances of US intervention overseas associated with the amount of controversy regarding foreign policy decisions as with the current war in Iraq. The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent attempt to establish a democratic state in the Middle East are flooded with reports of misjudgments and displacement of responsibility for the events that occurred. While it is difficult to accurately identify the number of Iraqi and American casualties sustained, the Lancet Survey of mortality has conservatively estimated that the bloodshed has claimed the lives of over 100,000 Iraqis and 2,000 American soldiers since the start of the conflict in March 2003 (Roberts 1). In the events that followed President Bush's announcement on May 1, 2003 that major combat operations in Iraq were complete, each step taken towards establishing democracy in Iraq has resulted in discontent among the American public, which has fueled worldwide uncertainty and indignation regarding the ability to sustain a democratic government in the Middle Eastern country.

The primary reason publicly set forth by the Bush Administration for invading Iraq was the biological and chemical weapon disarmament of Saddam Hussein's regime. Over three years later, it has been found that sufficient evidence to support the claim that the Iraqi government possessed or was continuing the development of their weapons program does not exist. Officials from both the US and the United Kingdom have made the claim that evidence of the continued development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) would be located in due time, but over three years has passed since these claims were made without delivery of such evidence. As more time passes and additional information comes to light, the impetus for further analyzing the basis for the decision to invade Iraq becomes more intense and powerful.

Accordingly, one of the aims of this essay is to outline the ethical implications of the management and use of information relevant to the decision made by the Bush

Administration to launch “Operation Iraqi Freedom”. In the three years since the inception of the war, it has become clear that the United States government, acting as elected public servants, has violated inherent ethical duties to its citizens by intentionally influencing the intelligence community’s efforts, misusing intelligence publicly to justify past policy decisions, and politicizing the process of gathering intelligence data.

The Source of US Government’s Inherent Ethical Duties

The foundation of the US Government is one of democracy. Though the right to vote is determined at the state level, the US Constitution has been amended five separate times in an effort to ease restrictions placed by states on potential voters. The right to vote is viewed as a birth right without regard for race, gender, class, or ethnicity. In this context, US citizens have the opportunity to be heard in the election of public officials and to shape future policy decisions. In the process of elections and the formation of a sovereign Federal Government, an implicit social contract is created between public officials and the citizens of the United States. Appropriately, this essay is based on the framework developed by Jean-Jacque Rousseau in his 1762 work *The Social Contract*.

According to Rousseau, the individuals of a nation can avoid a state of nature, as described by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, by surrendering individual desires and preferences for the benefit of the collective whole. The act of coming together as a people is more than and different from simply aggregating individual interests; it is the “real foundation of society” (Rousseau 59). In the context of Rousseau’s social contract theory, the idea of reciprocating duties exists: the sovereign government is committed to the good of the citizens that compose it while each individual is likewise committed to the good of the whole. Consequently, the US government has the responsibility to act in a manner aligned with the best interests of its constituents.

The Disconnect Between Intelligence Gathering and Policymaking

In an ideal setting, a properly administered intelligence effort makes a clear distinction between the gathering of data and the process of establishing policies based on such data. While policymakers may direct which topics the intelligence community

investigates, under no circumstances are they supposed to influence the conclusions that are reached. This process becomes biased when policymakers repeatedly urge the intelligence community to investigate specific concerns, rather than allowing intelligence analysts to independently assess the concerns worthy of investigation. Further, because the majority of US citizens do not have the time, inclination, or sufficient resources to conduct individual research, the consensus opinion of society is open to manipulation.

Another factor affecting public opinion is that US citizens increasingly turn to those at the top of the governmental hierarchy, such as the President, senior administration officials, and Congress, as a primary source for information about the nation's national security interests. The degree of information asymmetry in the early stages of conflict provides the government an opportunity to influence how the situation is framed to the public (Brody 41). This asymmetry is especially important in the context of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In the time immediately following the attacks, the Bush Administration was able to capitalize on the vulnerable disposition of the nation in making its case to go to war.

Hidden Motives

The current Bush Administration has been criticized for its intent to misinform and misuse information for the advancement of political agendas. Numerous claims and accusations against the party have been made by a number of political analysts, several of which will be explained in the discussion to follow. Putting aside any bias or ulterior motive, there are facts that ultimately suggest that the United States government, specifically the Bush Administration, knowingly violated implicit duties to its citizens by utilizing various misinformation and propaganda tactics in presenting its case for the invasion of Iraq.

Misusing Intelligence Data

An example of the Bush Administration's misuse of intelligence data is seen in the handling of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in October 2002 on Iraqi weapons programs. This report was a strategic intelligence assessment on various

aspects of the possible invasion of Iraq. One of the most important issues conveyed by the 2002 NIE was a best-case scenario. At the time, Iraq was several years away from developing a nuclear weapon and the country was unlikely to use WMDs against the United States. Additionally, the report considered the potential range of obstacles the US would face in post-invasion Iraq. The problems presented included a forecast that Iraq would become increasingly divided, with resentment coming from both Sunnis and Shiites, fueling the increased likelihood of violent conflict between the two groups. The report also predicted that an occupying nation would become a target of hatred and guerilla warfare attacks (Pillar 17).

As the conflict has played out over the past three years, these concerns have been perpetuated. This is best illustrated through the recent controversy over the leak and subsequent declassification of the April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate. After portions of the report were declassified, it identified that “the Iraq conflict has become the ‘cause célèbre’ for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement,” (April 2006 NIE). As the CIA’s National Intelligence Officer for the Middle Eastern region from 2000-2005, Paul Pillar was charged with heading the intelligence community’s evaluation of the threat posed by Iraq (Pillar 15). The fact that the Bush Administration did not request any information from Pillar until a year into the war illustrates that intelligence data on Iraq was not a primary source of influence on its decision to overthrow the Hussein regime. This is also represented in Pillar’s sentiments expressed in the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* in March 2006, “What is most remarkable about prewar US intelligence on Iraq is not that it got things wrong and thereby misled policymakers; it is that it played so small a role in one of the most important US policy decisions in recent decades.”

Following the first three years of conflict in Iraq, much of the controversy has centered on the methods employed by the Bush Administration to sway public opinion in its desire to invade Iraq. In this time period, the administration publicly made statements which directly contradicted conclusions reached by the intelligence community. The height of these conflicting statements occurred during the 2003 State of the Union address made by President Bush. In the address, Bush alleged that Iraq had made

attempts to purchase uranium ore in Niger, which is an explosive used in the production of nuclear weapons. In late 2002, the Bush Administration received intelligence data from Italian sources of this attempt to procure uranium from Africa. In order to follow up on this information, the CIA sent retired diplomat Joseph Wilson to investigate. Wilson was unable to find sufficient evidence to support this claim and accordingly conveyed this to the US intelligence community. In fact, intelligence analysts increasingly questioned the credibility of the allegation and advised the administration against using the information publicly (Pillar 19).

Despite being advised against using the unsubstantiated intelligence, the Bush Administration still included the statement in the State of the Union address. Rather than relying on the entities charged with assessing the threats posed by foreign nations, this information suggests that President Bush and his administration were searching for reasons to launch an invasion. Following the State of the Union address, Joseph Wilson publicly denied the assertions made by President Bush. In the midst of public attempts to determine which claim was true, an undercover CIA agent's identity was leaked. The CIA agent in question, whose life was put at risk as a result, was Valerie Plame – the wife of Joseph Wilson. Numerous political analysts have since made the claim that a member of the Bush Administration leaked Plame's identity as a form of political retribution in response to Wilson's comments. Though the allegations of political retribution are controversial, the episode fueled an increased level of resentment and misconception expressed by the public regarding the situation in Iraq.

Misinformation on the Iraq War

A survey of the American public from June 2002 to September 2003 shows that more than 6 in 10 US citizens had misperceptions about the conflict. They believed, for example, that weapons of mass destruction were found, that Saddam had ties with Al-Qaeda, and that the collective world opinion favored the US invasion (Milio 631). This highlights some of the basic misperceptions that many people held surrounding the supposed facts and details concerning the invasion of Iraq. The notion that sixty percent of Americans unknowingly believed false claims cries for a deeper look into how the general public arrived at such viewpoints.

Information Control & Political Bias

A critical factor in the existence of these erroneous beliefs is the public's primary source of news. In the context of the conflict in Iraq, the most accurately informed used National Public Radio and read newspapers while the least informed frequented Fox News (Milio, 632). It is clear that those who watch unaffiliated, unbiased networks and news sources are being presented a perspective situated on one side of the political spectrum, while those that watch networks and news sources connected to special interest parties are receiving a perspective on the other side of the political spectrum.

With this in mind, there is evidence suggesting that political bias exists in government offices abroad. The Baghdad press office's stated task is to communicate to congress and Americans the positive side of the invasion, occupation, and reconstruction. Critics of the Bush Administration have said that the US/Iraq press office in Baghdad is basically a Republican Party operation run by political appointees who have worked on Bush election campaigns, for the Bush family, or in the Bush Administration (Milio 631). This suggests that the current administration is controlling information fed to certain news networks, as well as the source of the information. This is a glaring concern for those who believe in transparency and receiving an objective presentation of the situation, and not a censored, government-approved version. "By comparison, the British press office is staffed by long time civil servants, not political appointees, who have specialist regional knowledge and language skills; the US has five staff who know enough Arabic to be interviewed on Al Jazeera TV" (Milio 632).

The US government has gone to extremes in its desire to control the flow of information in and out of Iraq. The most egregious example of this desire is illustrated in the actions of the Pentagon by paying Iraqi newspapers to print "good" stories for distribution to American news sources. In one such case, a military official told the LA Times that the Pentagon had purchased an Iraqi newspaper and taken control of a radio station (Guardian Unlimited). This confirms the underlying aspiration of the Bush Administration to establish information asymmetries and then capitalize on them in order to sway public opinion in the US.

Further, it appears that there has been a plot or agenda involved with invading Iraq for quite some time now. After September 11th occurred, Iraq was immediately investigated for any level of involvement, possibly to justify an invasion. Even when no Iraqi involvement was uncovered, Saddam's regime was not completely absolved. Less than a year after the tragic events, nearly three-fourths of the House and Senate backed a resolution of force to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Shortly thereafter, a "preventative" war was ordered to support this cause with the US public rallying behind. There was an erroneous belief that Iraq and the events of September 11th were connected even though no such compelling evidence has been released to date (Western 130). In order for the Bush Administration to further its agenda to invade Iraq, senior administration officials began crafting a method of tying seemingly disconnected pieces of raw intelligence together using various propaganda devices.

Propaganda

Political analysts have stated that the current administration has used propaganda willfully as a tactic to encourage support of the invasion of Iraq. Propaganda uses the intertwining of political leaders, the mass media, public opinion, and their larger impact on one another. By employing the usage of symbols, arguments, and rhetoric repeatedly, the Bush Administration was able to manage the debate over Iraq in the US, conduct foreign policy, and attempt to win the peace by winning the war (Patrick 3). Clearly, this shows war is a very powerful political tool for those who have a vested interest in developing and maintaining power.

In the context of propaganda, there is a clear delineation to be made between winning a war and attaining peace in the region. Cessation of war compromises the ability to impose strict informational control, for then media professionals can act virtually at will, independent of the impositions of press pools, media events, censorship or embedding (Patrick 2). Therefore, if war ceases, or at least the appearance of war ceases to exist, those in power in the US lose the benefits derived from their control. In Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber's 2003 book, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*, the authors explain how it is in the US government's best interest to propel the issue forward into the public, justifying it in any

way they can. Thus, it would enable the government to maintain power and rush into a war that had long since been planned. Through precise and careful planning, the Bush Administration was able to time the unfolding events to align with the highly emotional time surrounding the first anniversary of the September 11th attacks. Was there truly a tie to the events of September 11th and Saddam Hussein, or was this simply another propaganda tactic employed?

Misinformation on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Finally, the largest and most controversial reason for the invasion of Iraq was the claim that Iraq possessed WMDs, or the components necessary to assemble WMDs. Since the invasion, US and UK forces have failed to uncover any significant amount of either biological or chemical agents (Isenberg 1). The facts surrounding this failure have been largely secretive and unknown. In the aftermath of the controversy surrounding Iraqi WMDs, the Bush Administration has stated publicly that it was not alone in its view that Saddam had active weapons programs however mistaken that opinion may have been. Though inadvertently, the Bush Administration identified the fundamental issue discussed in this essay: that intelligence on Iraqi weapons programs and WMDs were not the primary factor in its decision to go to war. This is highlighted by Paul Pillar's comments and the Joseph Wilson incident, as explained earlier.

It has been established that the Bush Administration used the claim of Iraqi WMDs as the driving force behind the invasion. Yet, it has now conveniently evolved to the establishment of democracy. This shift highlights the intent of the Bush Administration to largely ignore the information as presented to them and instead, manipulate intelligence data to align with its agenda. As the manipulation was uncovered later, Bush was on record saying "We were not lying...it was just a matter of emphasis" (Isenberg 1).

Ethical Implications

In evaluating the ethical implications of actions taken by the Bush Administration, it is important to note that the effectiveness of US foreign-policy development and the

right of US citizens to know the basis for decisions taken in the name of their security is at risk. These principles are critical in determining whether the US government actually sought a pretext for launching the military invasion of Iraq. Additionally, it is important to note that one of the fundamental features of democratic politics is that military force is only exercised after considering public sentiment. Though history has shown that elected officials are sensitive to public opinion in regards to conflict, a number of trends have been identified in the public's view on the use of force. Three of these trends include: (1) Americans will support the use of force if their security is threatened – without regard for the legitimacy of the threat, (2) in the events leading to war, Americans prefer diplomacy and multilateral attempts at conflict resolution over unilateral action, and (3) Americans will remain committed to the use of force as long as there is a clear prospect of victory and the costs, both casualties and financial, are required to achieve the stated objectives (Western 108).

Despite the fact that scholars have identified these public predispositions to the use of force, public opinion in these types of conflicts is highly sensitive to information disseminated by the government. The information presented here shows that the manipulation of these trends can result in serious ethical implications. The first of these trends was in fact true. Though there was a sense of a heightened level of risk to the security of the United States and its citizens, this threat was artificially inflated by the tactics employed by the Bush Administration. Americans were deceived into a false belief of the threat, illustrated by the information presented earlier that approximately two-thirds of Americans had misperceptions about the conflict. The use of propaganda, the claim of the possession of WMD's, and the misperception of global support of the invasion all led to a distorted sense of threatened security. The major implication of these actions is that the trust placed by American citizens in the government is compromised. A large part of the foundation that the United States of America was built on is this innate trust between the government and the nation's citizens. Acting in such a manner that violates this trust is contrary to this fundamental value of democracy.

The second trend refers to the use of diplomacy and multilateral action over unilateral action. The actions of the US government in unilaterally dealing with the conflict in Iraq are quite contrary to the United Nations charter. While many in the

United States and abroad view the UN as a foreign entity, the UN charter was overwhelmingly ratified by the US Senate and is a treaty of the United States. Under the Constitution, all treaties are a part of US law. Bruce Ackerman, Professor of Law and Political Science at Yale University, concludes that because of this feature of the Constitution, the actions of the US government are not a matter of international law. Rather, the government's actions are a matter of US law. Under the UN charter, Article 51 is the only text that authorizes unilateral military action. The US government has a tradition of avoiding unilateral military action, based on the model set by former Secretary of State Daniel Webster in resolving the dispute between Great Britain and the United States near the US-Canada border in the mid-1800s. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 set a legal precedent and the basis of international law that says the US government "can only engage in military action when there is a necessity of self-defense, instant and overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment of deliberation," (Yale Panel 2). In the context of the situation in Iraq and this binding formulation of international law, the Bush Administration was clearly not justified in its use of military action.

As a charter member of the UN and a permanent member of its Security Council, the US government is inherently advocating the use of the multi-lateral negotiations and conflict resolution. This position in the scheme of the geo-political world of today suggests the members of the UN accept and support the policies and initiatives ratified by the organization. In its own interpretation of Resolution 1441, authorized by the UN and negotiated by Secretary of State Colin Powell, the US government directly circumvented the conclusions that were reached. Resolution 1441 stated four points: (1) Iraq was in material breach of the Security Council's prior resolutions, (2) Iraq would have a final opportunity to rectify this breach by submitting various documents relevant to the situation, (3) serious actions would be considered if Iraq was in further material breach, and (4) the Security Council remained resolute in not undertaking military action at the current time (Yale Panel 3). When looking at the Iraq conflict with this structure in mind, the argument that Iraq was in violation of previous UN resolutions would not justify military intervention, since the Security Council acknowledged that they were in material breach and that some further violation was necessary. Additionally, Iraq did in fact

submit the documents requested by the Security Council. Shortly after the final resolution, President Bush attempted to seize jurisdiction from the Security Council, leaving the US as the lone institution to assess whether there was any further violation on the part of Iraq. By circumventing the policies and processes that the government agreed to by signing the UN charter, the Bush Administration is abusing the political capital of the United States, as well as its position of trust with the American people.

The third trend previously identified by Jon Western relates to public opinion in terms of continued support as long as a clear prospect of victory exists. As President Bush and his Administration have stated, the current war in Iraq is like no other war the US has experienced. In this context, it is increasingly difficult to determine a clear prospect of victory – let alone the actual costs in terms of money and casualties. Further, because the stated objectives of the Bush Administration have moved from the destruction of WMDs, to regime change in Iraq, to humanitarian intervention against Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, there is an overwhelming sense of multi-faceted and over-determined motives guiding the actions taken by the Bush Administration. As these objectives change, the prospect of victory in this circumstance becomes diluted to the US public. With this in mind, the wide-sweeping changes seen in public support for the war makes sense. Without clear goals and objectives, the United States government is limiting public support for its actions.

Conclusions

As the cornerstone of democracy in the world, the United States has been historically viewed as a model for other countries to utilize in establishing democratic societies and values. Accordingly, the United States has an inherent burden to uphold those very principles and values such as a free press, government accountability, and the idea that a nation's government *serves* the people, rather than leading it. There are various instances in which the actions of the Bush Administration have deviated from these democratic principles advocated by the US government. The conduct of the US government has been contrary to the very principles the administration is advocating, in this case to the Iraqi people. This is illustrated by a Senior Pentagon Official saying, "Here we are trying to create the principles of democracy in Iraq. Every speech we give

in that country is about democracy. And we're breaking all the first principles of democracy when we're doing it," (Mazzetti A1). In this sense, there is a fundamental absence of accountability in imposing personally held beliefs and values on another group or sect of people. There is an overlying component of hypocrisy in the way that the Iraq conflict has been and is currently being handled.

The Bush Administration intentionally influenced the intelligence community's efforts by applying pressure on intelligence analysts to provide information that aligns with its agenda, thereby supporting its case to go to war. Additionally, the Administration misused intelligence data publicly in asserting that Iraq was attempting to procure components of WMD's in Bush's 2003 State of the Union address. Finally, the government politicized the process of gathering intelligence by using propaganda to sway the opinions of the US public, such as paying Iraqi news and radio outlets for positive stories. As a result, it is clear that the US government overstated the threat posed by Iraq, and consequently – violated inherent duties to its citizens.

Further Discussion

The United States has an increased burden due to its hegemony in terms of military power. This is illustrated in the fact that the US Defense budget is currently larger than the defense budgets of the next twenty-five largest militaries in the world combined (Hellman 1). As a result of this position as a global military leader, the future of international order and an era of unprecedented US military and economic dominance are at stake.

As a result of the perceived US supremacy going forward, the US government has a responsibility to use this power ethically to serve national and international concerns. In this context, the burden of leading by example is placed on the future actions of the United States and the elected officials leading the nation. On the other hand, the US also has an opportunity to abuse this power without regard of the implications, in order to sustain global dominance (Kaysen 5). This dilemma poses an interesting scenario for US foreign affairs in the future. Thus, the US must be cognizant of the fine line between building adequate defenses and creating an imperialistic military force. The US cannot create and, at the same time, advocate against this building of global dominance. While

this topic is undoubtedly relevant to the issues previously discussed, it is outside of the scope of this essay and is left for further discussion.

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