

History Internal Investigation

An Exploration of The Motivations Behind The 2003 United States and Iraq War

To what extent was America's decision to attack Iraq in 2003 politically motivated?

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Section 1: Identification and Evaluation of Sources

This paper will explore the research question, “To what extent was America’s decision to attack Iraq in 2003 politically motivated?” The US’s declaration of war on Iraq was controversial as it was based on false accusations stating that Iraq held weapons of mass destruction. It led to thousands of unnecessary deaths, which has led historians to explore several potential underlying motivations.

A speech from President George W. Bush addressing the State of The Union in 2002 prior to the war declaration on Iraq; he states different motivations and accusations towards Iraq as he publicly ridicules Saddam Hussein’s regime for their extremist policies and overall threat towards the US (President Delivers). This gives insight into the Bush Administration’s direct line of thinking. An excerpt from “The Reasons Behind U.S. Invasion of Iraq,” a research paper written by three graduate students at Eastern Mediterranean University that examines potential motivations based on differing perspectives of the Iraq War (Ipek, Danju).

A value of the origin of George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address is that it was given before the commencement of the war, which allows for insight into the current views of the United States. Furthermore, a value of the purpose is that it was to shape public opinion in favor of the political motivations behind the Iraq War, which highlights Bush’s ideologies surrounding the weapons of mass destruction. A value of the content is that Bush directly highlights the problems with Iraq and his administration's view on them, giving direct insight into the potential motivations of the war. However, a limitation of the origin is that since the speech was made public, Bush was limited in what he could say, as he likely was significantly regulated by his

administration. A limitation of the purpose is that Bush was attempting to convince the public that the Iraq war was necessary, which raises concerns of biases through selectivity, explicitly concerning the opinions of the Bush Administration. Finally, the content is limited as Bush primarily focused on the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which neglected other potential motivations.

A value of the origin of the 2013 Eastern Mediterranean University research paper "The Reasons Behind U.S. Invasion of Iraq" is that it was written well after the initial declaration of war, which gives the benefit of hindsight, allowing for a more complex analysis of Bush's accusations that were later disproven. A value of the purpose is that it was written to explore the declaration of war from a wide range of perspectives, which limits biases. A value of the content is that it analyzes each perspective equally, giving an equal representation of each potential motivation without specifically focusing on one. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the broader picture that does not lean heavily into one direction. A limitation of its origin is that it is written by several authors from Cyprus, potentially limiting their understanding of US values. Furthermore, a limitation of its purpose is that it explores three perspectives without considering many other potential factors. Finally, a limitation of its content is that it abruptly switches to new perspectives, which could limit the amount of information explored for each perspective.

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Ipek Danju, Yasar Maasoglu, Nahide Maasoglu, The Reasons Behind U.S. Invasion of Iraq, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 81, 2013, Pages 682-690, ISSN 1877-0428, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.496>.
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Section 2: Investigation

Tensions rose between the United States and several Middle Eastern countries after the September 11th terrorist attacks. In attempts to subdue terrorism in the Middle East, US President George W. Bush and his administration launched the war on terrorism. This would ultimately lead to full-scale wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq (Richard, Jackson). At the time of the war, Iraq was under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship; this furthered the tensions between Iraq and the US due to Hussein's violent policies. The US's war declaration on Iraq has been controversial, and the motivations behind the war have been questioned over the last twenty years. On the surface, the motivations for America's decision to attack Iraq in 2003 revolved around political concerns about Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and the need to suppress Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, but the underlying economic motivations, including the pursuit of oil resources in the Middle East, also played a significant role.

Although there were many motivations for the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the most prominent claim by the United States was the threat of WMDs. In 2001, Adnan Ihsan Saeed al-Haideri, a civil engineer in Iraq, informed the US that Iraq was secretly crafting biological and chemical weapons (Saddam Hussein's Development). Later, it was confirmed that Saddam Hussein could build weapons of mass destruction, which alarmed the Bush administration (Saddam Hussein's Development). There would be a growing concern for Iraq's capability in war and Hussein's dictatorship. Since this political system drastically differed from the US's state of democracy, it added to the tensions and uncertainty in international relations, which were already fueled by

embargos sanctioned by the US a decade prior due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (U.S. Department). In 2002, Bush referred to Iraq and its allies as an "axis of evil," which exemplified the US's position against Iraq and reinforced the growing fear of terrorism in the Middle East (President Delivers). However, there was still no probable cause for initiating a large-scale war. Eventually, Iraq failed to uphold an agreement that allowed the US to inspect its weapons (The Iraq War). Seeing this as a threat, Bush brought his concerns to the United Nations (The Iraq War). Here, he proposed a declaration of war but was rejected (The Iraq War). Still, with the support of several other major countries, the US declared war on Iraq, with Bush stating that there was "no doubt" that Hussein had WMDs (The Iraq War). This political maneuver, which was based on the allegations of WMDs would define the war and serve as the scapegoat for the motivations behind the war. This is why the Iraq war is commonly referred to as a politically based attack. However, the claims of WMDs would later be proven untrue, which is why the war declaration is such a controversial topic (Merchant, Nomaan). In hindsight, the Iraq War serves as an example of the consequences of launching military campaigns without strong evidence. The politically driven decision to attack Iraq based on unverified claims of WMDs not only resulted in a costly conflict but also tarnished the credibility of those responsible for making such a pivotal choice. The revelation that the claims were unfounded adds to what can be seen as a poorly justified and ill-conceived political maneuver, raising questions about the true motivations behind the attack. Although the threat of WMDs was the prominent motivation for the war, several other potential motivations fueled the US's decision to attack Iraq.

In addition to the looming threat of WMDs, the US was also concerned by Hussein's dictatorship and its affiliation with terrorist organizations. To the best knowledge of the Bush Administration, Iraq supported Al-Qaeda, the group credited for orchestrating the 9/11 attacks (Britannica). Also, Hussein had been accused of harboring several terrorist groups as well as offering rewards to families of suicide bombers (Saddam Hussein's Support). Due to the American-led war on terror, the Bush administration would be inclined to attack affiliates of terrorist organizations.

Additionally, Saddam Hussein had extremist ruling policies. After he gained control of Iraq, his regime was accused of raping, executing, and torturing citizens (Bureau of Democracy). Another common belief was that Hussein would not relinquish his power, which would threaten both Iraqi citizens and the spread of democracy (Ipek Danju). Due to power misuse by other dictators in the past, the US held a stigmatism around dictatorships. While several other world powers were also under dictatorships or political systems that diverged from democracy, including other countries in the "axis of evil," such as North Korea, the US made a conscious political move to limit resource spending to only the Iraqi war. This would allow the US to set an expectation for countries of similar positions without expending their resources towards dictatorships worldwide. Ultimately, they used Iraq to send a warning to other global powers. The Bush administration's dual concerns over WMDs and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, coupled with the perceived ties to terrorism, set the stage for military intervention through a political lens.

Although the common justifications surrounding the Iraq War stem from political motivations, the economic motivations are just as prevalent. The US, a capitalistic world power, generally has a significant role in the global market. As it failed to control the Iraqi oil market, it is theorized that the US approached the UN to get permission to attack Iraq but justified it with the fear of WMDs (Ipek Danju). Nevertheless, the UN declined their request to declare war on Iraq (The Iraq War). Exhausted and impatient from the lack of cooperation from the UN, it is believed that the US took swift action to gain control of Iraqi oil (Ipek Danju). If this were the case, the allegations of false accusations of WMDs would have been a front to gain support for the attack. In hindsight, since the US has taken a significant interest in oil from many Middle Eastern countries over the past two decades, the facade derived from Bush's claims would be logically coherent. Additionally, at the time of the war, Bush was also endorsing an energy strategy heavily dependent on a large oil supply, which is why his campaign was aptly referred to as "blood for oil" (Bromley, Simon). Although Bush's claims did not mention these economic motivations, the head of the US Coalition Provisional Authority, L. Paul Bremer, contradicted Bush, stating that Iraq was officially "open for business" in reference to Iraq's oil-driven economy following the US's attack (Ufheil-Somers, Amanda). In concurrence with Bremer's statement, the US has reportedly imported hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil per day from Iraq, which highlights the importance of Iraq to its own economic needs (U.S. Petroleum). Eventually, in a 2003 television interview, Bush admitted that Iraq's supply of WMDs had been destroyed in the 1990s (Noshab, Farzana). Although the war had begun just earlier that year, the Bush administration backtracked on their claims of WMDs, raising doubts about their

credibility: why was the US deceived by a claim that was negated swiftly after the war commenced? Since Bush entered the war claiming he held “no doubt” that Iraq had access to WMDs, the mistake further endorses the argument that the war was economically motivated, which is coupled with a response from UK governmental advisor Sir Jonathan Porritt, “I do not think that war would have happened if Iraq did not have the second largest oil reserves in the world” (Noshab, Farzana). When analyzing the broader context of the war, evidence of potential economic motivations is overwhelming. Ultimately, the intricate web of economic interests surrounding the Iraq War, particularly the strategic importance of Iraq's oil reserves, challenges the notion that the conflict was solely politically motivated.

The decision to initiate the 2003 Iraq War had various factors, with political justifications centered on concerns about WMDs, the need to suppress Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, and combat rising terrorism threats. However, intertwined with these political motives were economic considerations, particularly the pursuit of oil resources in the Middle East. While never directly admitted by the Bush Administration, when taking a holistic approach to analyzing the motivations behind the war, the overwhelming evidence to support the notion that the US was economically motivated negates their claims that the war was entirely politically motivated. In essence, although the war is primarily considered a political maneuver by the US government, the factors that enticed the decision to attack Iraq in 2003 extend beyond purely political realms, revealing economic motivations fueled by Iraq's oil industry.

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Section 3: Reflection

A challenge that occurred during my research of primary sources revolved around selectivity, especially when analyzing speeches given by George W. Bush. This is exemplified in his State of The Union Address in 2002, where he only highlighted the threats posed by Hussein's regime without mentioning any other interests the US may have held in Iraq (President Delivers). This narrow focus is a common theme throughout several of the speeches or statements given by Bush and other government officials at the time. In an attempt to understand the broader picture contextually, I had to 'think like a historian' and analyze potential flaws in Bush's speeches, flaws that were especially highlighted as his claims were disproved. Throughout this process, I had to outsource information from secondary sources to understand the subtext of his speeches, specifically revolving around the public accusations that the US was economically motivated, trading "blood for oil" (Bromley, Simon). The extensive process of comparing and contrasting both primary and secondary sources to understand the complete picture highlighted the challenges faced by historians and the importance of considering numerous perspectives.

When analyzing "The Reasons Behind U.S. Invasion of Iraq," it is important to consider the graduate students at Eastern Mediterranean University had the benefit of hindsight. They considered multiple perspectives, but they were not based in the US or an affiliated country, which could limit their understanding of US values (Ipek, Danju). Contextualizing the origin of their paper was necessary. I came to understand they were accustomed to an economic system similar to the US, which adds credibility to the analysis as their inherent biases towards economic motivations were limited.

Additionally, their paper was peer-reviewed and published. Analyzing this paper and similar ones throughout the research process highlighted the importance of accounting for credibility and fully contextualizing the origin of the source to confirm that the points are valid.

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