

Liberalism theory on the invasion of Iraq-Case Study Analysis

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The invasion of Iraq has become one of the most well-known events of the twenty first century and this has been mainly as a result of its highly politicised nature. One would suggest that it came about as a result of a bid by the United States to reassert its position as a global power as well as to ensure that those entities that were considered to be a direct threat to its security were subdued. Because of its highly controversial nature and the length of time it took to not only to bring the war to an end, but also the instability that has gripped Iraq since the beginning of the invasion, many theories have been brought forward to explain the invasion and why it had to happen. Among the most prominent is liberalism, which is a theory that promotes the development of peace at an international level through active cooperation between the various states within it (Terminski, 2010). This paper seeks to show how liberalism played a hand in ensuring that the Iraq invasion took place and the reasoning behind why it was essential for the war to take place as a way of securing American and allied national interests in the international arena.

Before the 9/11 attacks took place in the United States, the liberal voice in the international relations has essentially been silenced. This silencing was mainly as a result of the relative security that this country had enjoyed for a long time and this had ensured that more conservative voices were given prominence (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002). Even during the 2000 presidential debate, the Republican presidential candidate George Bush had scoffed at the liberal belief that it was necessary to export democracy to those countries in the rest of the world which had autocratic forms of government. This argument was based on the liberal belief that the only way through which there could be lasting peace and cooperation between nations across the world was through ensuring that all of them had adopted democratic systems which made possible better understanding as well as similar beliefs which would be difficult to violate. Such arguments did not have much currency among the American elite at the time and it only came to the foreground after the 9/11 attacks which suddenly shook the

foundation of domestic security that had been developed within the United States since the Second World War. The Bush administration took the unprecedented step of shifting its ideology from a conservative one to an extremely liberal one and this was represented especially through his declaration of war against the Baath regime in Iraq in a bid to overthrow it and replace it with a democratic government (Bumiller, 2004). The 9/11 attacks were committed by individuals whose origins, while not Iraq, came from non-democratic countries within the region and this created a situation where the liberal opinion was that the invasion had taken place because these were individuals who came from backgrounds without freedom. Therefore, the Iraq invasion was based on the belief that the best way to counter any further terrorist attacks would be through ensuring that a strong democracy was developed in Iraq and this would serve as an example for other autocratic countries in the Middle Eastern region.

Among the most critical philosophies of liberalism, especially the democratic peace theory, in international relations is that there is need for democracy throughout the globe to ensure that there is lasting peace and cooperation between all the nations within it. This is especially the case where it is believed that those countries that are democratic and share the same ideals are less likely to fight one another and this is a guarantee for lasting peace (Gleditsch, 1992). Therefore, a motivation for the invasion of Iraq was to ensure that a regime that was hostile to the interests of the United States and its allies, all democratic countries, was overthrown to be replaced with one that shared the same ideals as the invaders. As one of the most authoritarian states in the world in the period before the American led invasion, Iraq was believed to be a symbol of what a country without any democratic ideals would end up becoming. Thus, the Iraq invasion can be considered to have been a means of showing that despite the 9/11 attacks having taken place, the United States and its allies still had the ability to project their power across the globe and that any threat that was brought against them either

by authoritarian regimes or by terrorist organisations would be swiftly repulsed. It was through the Iraqi invasion that the United States was able to show its people that it was still able to protect them against any terrorist attacks as well as other threats that might arise in future. It should be noted that the 9/11 attacks were met with a lot of anger from the American public especially when it was discovered that most of the security agencies had known that a potential threat was imminent (Lichtblau, 2005). Therefore, it was essential for the American government to get the situation under control and this was done through the invasion of Iraq especially for the consumption of the domestic audience rather than the ideals that it claimed to be fighting for in Iraq.

The United States could not have made a direct attack against its allies in the Middle East and it chose a country that was considered to be a security threat to attack. This invasion was planned and carried out even though there were other Middle Eastern countries whose governments were more authoritarian than the Baath regime in Iraq. The ability of these countries governments, such as that of Saudi Arabia, to deny their people freedoms and rights were far greater than that of Iraq yet it was the latter that was attacked (Brynen, Korany, and Noble, 1995, p. 285). The main reason why Iraq was attacked was mainly because it was not a major ally of the United States and it had essentially come to be considered a threat as a result of its choosing to invade Kuwait, an action that had resulted in the first Gulf War. From this period onwards, Saddam Hussein and his regime had come to be considered as a potentially destabilising factor in the Middle East and the invasion of Iraq was an opportunity to remove this regime from power. Under these circumstances and in line with liberalism, one would suggest that the Iraq invasion was done for the purpose of ensuring lasting peace in the Middle East. The potential of a conflict between Iraq and other Middle Eastern powers such as Saudi Arabia and Israel was a real possibility and it is for this reason that the United States had to step in because both of the countries named were its allies. Therefore, Iraq was invaded

out of convenience because despite other countries in the Middle East being authoritarian, most of them were allies of the United States and it could not take action against them because such actions would have been against its own national interests (Werner and Lemke, 1997). The Iraq invasion and the building of newer and more democratic organs of state were done in a bid to ensure that this country came to adopt the democratic ideals necessary to serve as an example or model for the rest of the Middle East.

From a liberal perspective, the Iraq invasion showed a level of sophistication in the manner in which the United States and its allies were able to cooperate militarily. This cooperation was brought about as a result of what they all saw as a common threat arising from a potential of an authoritarian regime sponsoring terrorist activities against them (Reiter and Stam, 2003). The cooperation that took place between these countries was in line with liberal thought where these countries were able to work together to ensure that they attained common goals. From a liberal perspective, the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath were important because they brought the United States and its allies together in a manner that had not been seen since the Second World War when all of these countries had been under threat from Nazi Germany and its allies. The actions of these countries when they invaded Iraq are correct in the liberal view because they were conducted for the purpose of ensuring their national security. This form of international cooperation was what was had in mind when the liberal perspective of international relations was established during the Enlightenment period when it was believed that it was only when countries across the globe cooperated that there would be a guarantee of peace (Souva, 2004). Without the cooperation that these countries undertook in solidarity with the United States after the 9/11 attacks, the American invasion of Iraq would not have been as successful as it was and it is most likely that the United States would have ended up being bogged down in this country in a disastrous scenario like the one that took place during the war in Vietnam. Cooperation between the allies is what brought about

democracy as well as a sense of hope and freedom among the people of Iraq at a level that had not been seen in many decades.

It is most likely that if Iraq had been a mature democracy, the United States invasion would not have occurred and the situation would have played out quite differently. From a liberal perspective, mature democracies do not normally fight against each other because to do so would be to go against the democratic ideal (Layne, 1994). Furthermore, as a result of their being democracies, these states are less likely to fight each other because they share common ideals which open up avenues for cooperation rather than antagonism. This is the reason why since the Second World War, the United States has been able to develop strong alliances with fellow democratic countries in Western Europe. These alliances range from political, economic and military and these have made it possible for Western countries to develop a set of liberal ideals that they have attempted to propagate across the world (Jervis, 2002). The common ideals that are shared by these democracies have led to a situation where they have formed a strong military alliance, namely NATO, whose main purpose has been to ensure that there is mutually assured security among its members. One would also suggest that the formation of this alliance was done to ensure that the various conflicts between its members would not lead to military conflict among them and instead, there would be other avenues through which the different conflicts of interests would be addressed for mutual benefit. Therefore, the invasion of Iraq can be attributed to the threat that was posed to the United States as well as the invocation of Article 5 of the NATO constitution which states that an attack on one is considered an attack on all. Therefore, when the United States was attacked on 9/11, its allies, following the liberal tradition, were obliged to support its efforts to guarantee its national security and this brought about an alliance that invaded Iraq and overthrew the autocratic Baath regime.

Liberalism promotes the idea that democracies are more likely to go to war against non-democracies than against themselves (Russett et al, 1998). This is essentially what happened in the Iraq invasion where an alliance of democratic countries worked together to overthrow a government that was authoritarian. It is necessary to note that the Baath regime had ruled Iraq for several decades and this had created a situation where they had come to abuse the rights of people within this country as well as entrenching themselves in power to such an extent that they felt secure enough to rule the country for as long as they wanted. The ability of Saddam Hussein, a man who came from a minority sect in Iraq to dominate this country for decades can be attributed to the authoritarian means that he used to intimidate the people over whom he ruled to submit to his regime. This was a situation that went against liberal ideals especially when one considers that liberalism promotes the idea of democracy above all else. Therefore, because Iraq was an undemocratic state, it was inevitable that eventually, it would have to clash with established democratic countries because the latter saw it as a threat to their attempt to create a new liberal order in the world (Ray, 1998). The failure of the Baath party to undertake the reforms necessary to ensure that Iraq embraced democracy and developed a system of governance similar to those of the West created conditions that were conducive for the development of an authoritarian state. Such a state, especially one that was hostile to the interests of Western allies was not acceptable because its activities came to be viewed as a challenge that could not be ignored. Under these circumstances, the liberal stance that democratic countries only fight authoritarian ones came into play and this resulted in the United States invading and occupying Iraq for almost a decade in a bid to turn this state into a democracy similar to them. The nation-building effort in Iraq that was spearheaded by Britain and the United States was designed in such a manner as to ensure that a liberal system of governance was developed and this in such a way as to create a situation where its interests and those of the West were brought together. Under such a system, it would have been

possible for democracy to be fostered while at the same time help in the protection of western interests in the Middle Eastern region.

Liberalism is a theory that supports the development and protection of human rights as well as individual freedoms all over the world and this was especially the case in the American invasion of Iraq. Among the justifications that were made for the Iraq invasion was that it was being done for humanitarian reasons and the lack of individual rights in this country was cited as an example (Powers, 2004). This invasion came about after the brutality of the regime especially in the 1980s when, during the war between Iraq and Iran, the former had committed numerous human rights violations against not only its opponent, but also against its own population that was believed to be supporting the enemy. Some of the worst treated people during this period were the Kurds who faced numerous atrocities from the government of Saddam Hussein and the oppression that they were forced to undergo were most brutal. Furthermore, the Shia community in the country also faced plenty of open discrimination as well as the imprisonment of its political leaders and any of those who opposed the Baath regime and this had led to a significant number of this community to go into exile; many to neighbouring Iran. Hussein had convinced the Sunni in Iraq, a minority sect to which he belonged, that they were the majority in the country and that the Shia's intention was to overthrow his government and set up one which would be oppressive to the said majority. Such statements by their leader created a high level of tension between the two major Islamic sects in the country and this was done in a bid to ensure that the Baath regime remained entrenched in power. All of the actions that were taken by this regime went against the liberal principle which stood for individual freedoms as well as democracy and this is the reason why the United States and its allies, most of them liberal democracies, chose to take action to ensure that the people of Iraq were able to enjoy the same freedoms that the people in democratic states did. Therefore, the invasion of Iraq by liberal democracies was done for



humanitarian reasons and it was done in a manner that made sure that an authoritarian regime was overthrown and a more democratic one was ushered in to guarantee the freedoms of the Iraqi people.

From a liberal point of view, global security can not only be guaranteed through the spread of democracy, but also that of trade because the latter is vital for cooperation. The liberalisation of trade is one of the epitomes of a liberal international order because it creates the conditions necessary to ensure that goods and services are able to move from one part of the globe to another without any restrictions (Gartzke, 2007). Furthermore, trade is a means through which individuals from different parts of the world come to interact and it is through this interaction that they get to know about and understand each other in such a way that there is a lessening of conflict between them. Under these circumstances, a majority of the people in the world become beneficiaries of the new economic order because they will be able to conduct business with each other without many of the hindrances that might bring about conflict. This is exactly what happened in Iraq because after the first Gulf War, Iraq had been placed under economic sanctions by the United Nations for the role it played in the devastation of Kuwait as well as the oppression of the Kurdish minority to the north of Iraq (Peceny and Butler, 2004). These sanctions, despite having been put in place to ensure that the Baath regime changed its behaviour for the better, were also detrimental for the country because it created a situation where it was no longer an integral part of the global economic system which would have helped the people of Iraq to prosper. As a result, many Iraqis had come to blame the West, rather than their own government, for their woes and such a situation would have led Iraq to become a fertile recruiting ground for terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda. Moreover, despite these economic sanctions being in place, the Baath regime under Saddam Hussein did not change its behaviour and it remained steadfast in its authoritarian ways. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, therefore, was carried out because the sanctions that had

been in place for more than a decade had not been effective and this was highly detrimental because Iraq was not completely tied to the global economic system. The toppling of the Baath regime was considered to be the best option to ensure that that Iraqi economy was more liberalised because it allowed for the opening of the markets for Iraqi oil while at the same time allowing for goods from other countries to get into Iraq without the hindrances that had been brought about by the sanctions.

Despite the arguments made above based on the liberalism theory on the invasion of Iraq, there were instances when the American government and its allies went against liberal ideals when they made justifications for the war. The first violation of the liberal ideal came about when these states chose to bypass the United Nations and took unilateral action in attacking a sovereign state. From a liberal point of view, an act of aggression against a sovereign country is not right especially when one considers that Iraq at that period was not a direct threat to the United States. Furthermore, during this period, the United States had just completed its invasion of Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban regime and it had already proven to those countries that posed a security threat to it that it was powerful enough to take them on if they challenged it. The invasion of Iraq soon after can be considered not to have been motivated by liberal ideals but rather by elitist ideals because it was the latter that stood to gain more than the people of Iraq (Bueno de Mesquita, 2002). The economic elite in the United States had a high stake in the Iraqi oil industry and their access to it was largely hindered by the Baath government in Baghdad. The invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of its government were therefore based on the interests of the elite in the oil business who wanted an opportunity to gain access to Iraqi oil. In addition, the political elite wanted to ensure their survival through the invasion of Iraq because the containment policy that had been adopted in the aftermath of the first Gulf War had not been effective (Gordon, 2004). The risks involved in the establishment of a no-fly zone over large parts of Iraq were highly expensive ventures

and as a result of their ineffectiveness, since there was always a risk that the highly expensive military planes could be shot down by Iraqi anti-aircraft missiles, the invasion was found to be necessary. Therefore, the invasion of Iraq came about as a result of the coming together of both political and economic interests rather than the liberal ideals of democracy and freedom that were used as an excuse for the invasion.

The anti-American rhetoric that had been adopted by the Baath regime in Iraq, rather than any serious belief in liberal ideals, may have been the real reason behind the invasion of Iraq. Saddam Hussein was a highly influential individual within the Middle East and his anti-Americanism, especially after the first Gulf War had created a situation where he came to be considered a security threat (Deegan, 1993, p.103). The Baath party that he led had been instrumental in the entrenchment of his power in Iraq and this had provided Hussein with the means through which he could become influential in the shaping of the future of the Middle East. This was especially the situation where he was one of the biggest patrons of the Palestinian cause, donating large sums of money as well as providing support for their various liberation movements. Furthermore, Hussein was among the most influential leaders in the Arab world who refused to recognise the state of Israel and this was considered a threat because it was more likely than not that he would support the armed struggle against Israel. Since Israel is one of the foremost American allies in the Middle East, the United States considered the Baath regime in Iraq to be a threat to its interests in the region and this is the reason why it chose to invade rather than continue the containment policy that it had been pursuing for over a decade. However, in order to invade a sovereign state without a United Nations mandate, the United States had to come up with a plausible reason and this is the reason why it declared that it was invading Iraq because it had evidence of the government having stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction within it (Kay, 2004). Moreover, the American government argued that its other intention was to free the people of Iraq from the

oppressive Baath regime and to usher in a new era of democracy within this country. All of these, however, turned out not to be true because the invasion brought about more problems within Iraq than those that existed before the invasion and this marked the beginning of the failure in American policy in Iraq.

The discussion above has sought to show that liberalism was influential in ensuring that the Iraq invasion took place as a way of securing American and allied national interests in the international arena. An argument has been made that prior to 9/11 the liberal voice in the United States had become limited. Furthermore, according to the democratic peace theory, there is need for democracy throughout the globe to ensure that there is lasting peace and cooperation among all the nations. But while putting this into consideration, it is essential to note that liberal policies made the United States choose to attack Iraq, believed to be a potential threat, rather than Saudi Arabia, the country of origin of most of the 9/11 attackers because the latter was an ally. Moreover, liberalism came to be seen through the cooperation between the United States and its allies in the invasion of Iraq. This can be explained through the statement that these were democracies warring against an authoritarian government since liberalism promotes the idea that democracies are more likely to go to war against non-democracies than against themselves. However, in conducting the invasion of Iraq, the United States went against the liberal ideal of gaining the approval of the United Nations before it launched the war and this can be considered to have been an act of aggression against a sovereign state. Finally, the war in Iraq came about as a result of the need to promote the liberal ideals of freedom, democracy and human rights alongside the interests of the American political and economic elite.

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