

FROM RHETORIC TO REALPOLITIK: THE IRAQ WAR, U.S. PSEUDO-INTERVENTIONISM, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

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Abstract

The study deconstructs the commonly accepted narratives that portrayed the United States' intervention in Iraq as a reaction to the security threats and a mission to establish democracy and protect human rights. The research highlights the significant role of oil interests and the pressure from the Israeli lobby in the U.S. during the Iraq War. Using a realpolitik perspective, it examines several secondary sources, including official statements, surveys, research papers, and scholarly discussions, to analyse the rational interests of the U.S. By using a postmodernist approach, the process incorporates qualitative analysis, deconstructing the popular discourses of the Iraq War. The research results demonstrate an intricate interaction between economic and political goals that largely deviate from publicly declared security and humanitarian concerns. Regarding International law, the U.S. intervention with the UN opposition was justified by the Bush administration as an attempt for preemptive self-defence and humanitarian intervention. Whereas, by deconstructing such discourses from the perspective of international law and realpolitik, it is evident that it was more inclined towards U.S. strategic interests rather than the legal norms. This highlights the concept of pseudo-interventionism as a disguise, accomplishing their rational motives in Iraq. The study enhances the understanding of International relations, International law and US foreign policy, specifically in Middle Eastern geopolitics, by examining the connection between economic and political interests, legal norms and institutions, and foreign policy.

Keywords: Iraq War, U.S. Interventionism, Bush Administration, WMDs, International Law.

Introduction

The 2003 United States (U.S.) intervention in Iraq is one of the most prominent events in world history and a major one after the 9/11

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attacks. The 9/11 incident is marked as a prominent event that changed the security dynamics of the world as well as the foreign policy of the U.S. Any single security threat, whether anticipated or real, was portrayed as an existential threat by the Bush Administration. The 2003 Intervention was among such so-called anticipated security threats, the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), loudly called up by the Bush Administration. Colin Powell accused Saddam Hussein of having WMD and portrayed it as an imminent threat to the whole world in his speech at the UN.¹ But the actual study lies in deconstructing the motive behind this US Pseudo-Interventionism. The motive that many scholars put up is Democratization and protection of human rights, which seems another pseudo reason given to engage the debate. Whereas the oil interests of the US and the pressure of the Israeli lobby remain highly unaddressed.

From the perspective of International law, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was not justified in its true sense of legality. Such type of state activity is not allowed by the United Nations as it does not allow any state to violate the other state's territorial integrity and political independence until the UN Security Council passes a resolution. Such approval was missing in the U.S. invasion of Iraq. However, the U.S. claims this attack was an action taken in the context of preemptive self-defence, but it was more of a preventive action. Still, no significant evidence was present of the WMDs on which the security argument was built. Also, a humanitarian intervention concept remains in the academia and U.S. administration that justifies the Iraq intervention based on promoting democracy and protecting human rights in Iraq.

The research is significant in understanding the difference between rhetoric and realpolitik. It shows how rhetoric is used to legitimise the rational interests of states. The research examines to which extent the rhetoric of WMD was the major motive behind the US intervention in Iraq and to what extent the motive of democratisation, oil interests, and pressure from the Israeli lobby influenced the US decisions. It also examines the Iraq War from the international perspective, deconstructing the justifications provided by the U.S. The research provides a critical framework for investigating the history and current affairs of global politics. Deconstructing US Pseudo-Interventionism will also help deconstruct the other political discourses set by the US.

From the Realpolitik perspective, the Iraq War was motivated by economic, political, and ideological motives rather than humanitarian and security concerns. The research aims to understand the genuine incentives of the US behind the Iraq Intervention, the impact of the oil industry and the Israeli lobby on US policymaking, and the role of the democratisation story in functioning as a deceptive cover for other hidden motives.

There remains a significant research gap in highlighting the hidden motives of the US Intervention in Iraq. Most of the scholarly debate is centered around whether the invasion was based on the threat of WMD or the promotion of democratic values and protection of human rights. But the other motives mostly remain covered. The study will focus on deconstructing the influential actors and interests that mainly motivated the intervention.

An Interpretivist epistemology is used to deconstruct the notion of WMD and to highlight the real motives behind the US Intervention in Iraq based on the qualitative data analysis depending on the research papers, scholarly articles, official statements, and reports. The subjective ontology is used based on the theoretical framework of postmodernism to deconstruct discourse and realpolitik and highlight the rational interests of the US.

Historical Background

The Iraq War was an eight-year-long war that was fought on the US rhetoric of WMD and Sponsorship of Terrorism that was later proved to be based on falsehood.² The war began on March 19, 2003. The major motive behind the US Intervention, as portrayed through their rhetoric, was to oust Hussein's regime and ensure the arrival of a democratically elected government. The US forces seemed to achieve the major motive of Operation Iraqi Freedom when, within months, they ousted the Hussein regime. But, later, the US troops remained in Iraq, claiming to end the militant groups active in Iraq and to support the peaceful transition towards a democratic Iraq.³ But the popular support that the US got, especially after the 9/11 attack, declined severely.

The Popular Discourses behind U.S. Intervention in Iraq

The U.S. motives in the Iraq War are divided into two categories: the pseudo motives and the real motives. In this section, the pseudo motives created

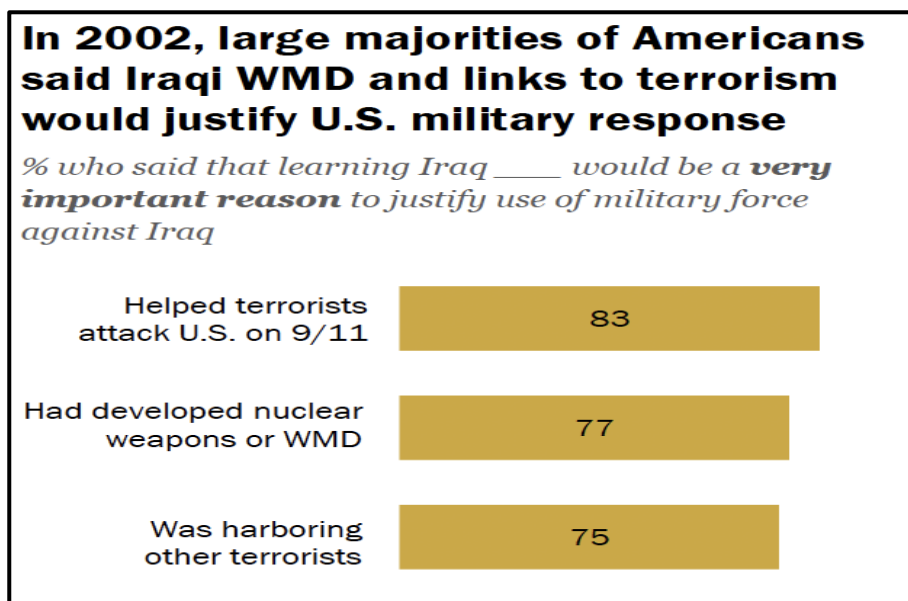
through the discursive discourses used in the public statement and by the academicians have developed the popular discourses of the U.S. Intervention in Iraq. After 9/11, securitisation was a significant tool of legitimacy for the U.S. to conceal its real strategic objectives; WMDs were one of that securitized rhetoric, which was thought to pose a substantial threat towards the U.S. and regional stability. The other reason that has been present in almost all major interventions of the U.S. is the humanitarian intervention. The idea of promoting democracy and protecting human rights served as the second legitimacy tool to hide their real objectives.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) & Terrorism

The First Speech of Bush at the State of the Union showed the level of hostility of the US towards Iraq. The statement is stated as,

“Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons, for over a decade.”⁴

This statement from Bush showed the start of a popular discourse by the Bush administration. 9/11 proved to be an essential tool for the US government to securitise everything and to create a popular discourse of security threats to accomplish their rational objectives. The success of the security discourse can be seen from surveys conducted before the Iraq War of 2003. In a survey conducted of US adults from January 09-12, 2002, a large majority of Americans believed that Iraq has links with terrorism and holds WMD. 83% of them believed that Iraq supported terrorists in the 9/11 attack, 77% believe in Iraq having WMD, and 75% believe that Iraq helps other terrorists.⁵



Source: Pew Research Center.⁶

Later, the Bush Administration had been critical vocal of Iraq and condemned Iraq for its support of terrorism and having WMD. The major statement in that period is of Dick Cheney, the Vice President of the US, who said,

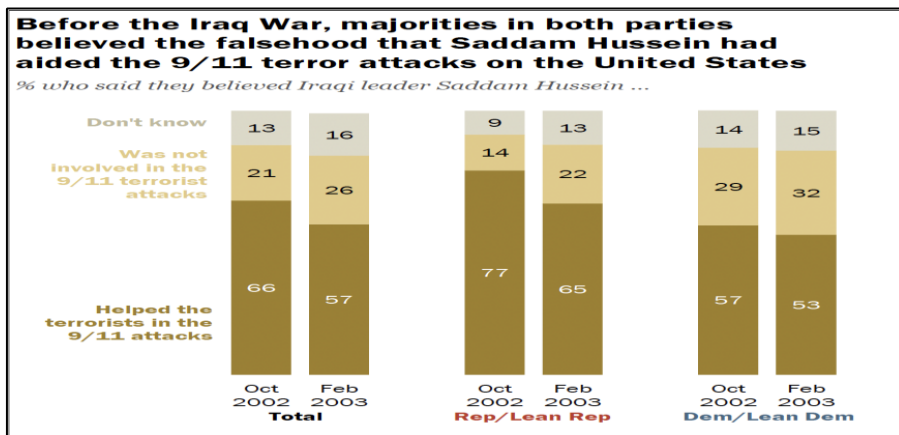
“Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.”⁷

Along with Iraq having WMD, the Bush Administration also hold Iraq accountable for supporting terrorists, especially having links with Al-Qaeda. In a statement, President Bush said that,

“We know that Iraq and the al-Qaida terrorist network share a common enemy – the United States of America, we know that Iraq and al-Qaida have had high-level contacts that go back a decade.”⁸

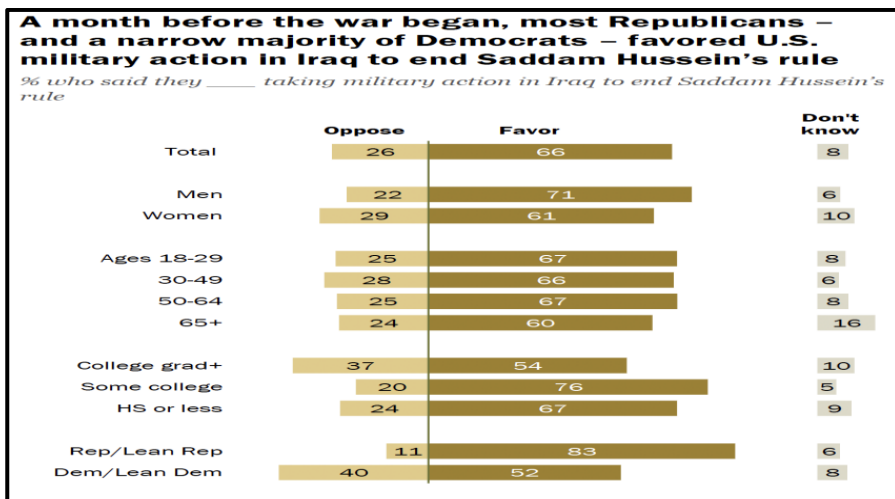
The speech from US Secretary of State Colin Powell was also a turning point where he asserted that the US claim of Iraq having WMD is based on solid sources and facts.⁹ Later, after 2 years, he called his UN address a “blot” on his career.¹⁰

Although the Bush administration never accused the Hussein regime of the 9/11 attack, the intensity of that pseudo rhetoric can be seen from the survey results shown in the graph. The majority of the positive responses were based on the 9/11 attack.



Source: Pew Research Center.¹¹

A month before the Invasion, from February 12-18, 2003, a survey was conducted to understand whether most people lie in either favour of military intervention in Iraq or in opposition. The survey showed a huge majority of people in favour of the Iraq War. The statistics can be seen in the below graph,



Source: Pew Research Center.¹²

Overall, the statistics listed above show how successful the rhetoric of WMD and the security threat from Iraq was engraved into the minds of people of all ages, genders, and professions. However, the real motives behind this pseudo-discourse will be discussed later in the paper. Before moving towards the actual rational motives, we need to understand a pseudo-debate created by some scholars between WMD and the US motive of Democratization to hide the oil interests and pressure of the Israeli lobby behind the Iraq War.

The Pseudo Debate of Democratization

By analysing the American literature on the Iraq War, one can argue that there has been a pseudo-debate to engage the scholarly debate between the two major pseudo-discourses of the Iraq War. Whereas the real motives have been hidden. Many scholars claimed that the discourse of WMD was false rhetoric and that the main aim of the US was to democratise Iraq and promote the Liberal World Order. Along with democracy, they also promoted that the US wanted to ensure that international humanitarian norms were fulfilled. Most of the scholars engaged in this debate seem to have a tilt towards liberal assumptions.

From the lens of realpolitik, democratisation cannot be the major reason behind the Iraq War. Had it been the prominent reason, there would be many other states that need democracy and a liberal world order more badly than Iraq. Even if it was about the supremacy of the liberal world order, there does not seem any rational benefit that the US got from promoting it.

The Real Motives behind U.S. Intervention in Iraq

The mainstream motives of the U.S. are discussed and deconstructed in the above section. This section aims to understand the real motives behind the U.S. intervention in Iraq. The two major motives behind the intervention were the oil interests of the U.S. in Iraq and to satisfy the Israeli lobby in the U.S. Regarding oil interests, the non-U.S. ally regime in Iraq wasn't serving the interests of the U.S., and it posed significant threats and challenges to the global oil market, particularly U.S. interests. The Israeli lobby remains the most powerful lobby in the U.S. and the most vocal critique of the regime of Saddam Hussein as a history of Iraq-Israel tussle in his era. Hence, to satisfy these hidden objectives, pseudo-motives were used, resulting in the U.S.

pseudo-interventionism, which was not based on international legal norms and traditions.

Oil Interests

Middle Eastern oil has long flourished the global powers and global capital since the early 20th century.¹³ The huge number of US involvement in what is called Petro Imperialism was witnessed in the 1990s. When Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq attacked Kuwait, the attack on Kuwait was geopolitically important as it would have not only resulted in the potential fallout of Kuwaiti oil but also of Saudi-Arabia oil. Disturbing a huge oil market could have global impacts. The US-led forces drove back Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, which was followed by a decade of sanctions.

Such regional instability was seen as a threat to the U.S. because Hussein's ambitions were very clear to the U.S. He wanted to dominate the Gulf region. Along with that, Iraq had the second-highest oil reserves in 2002, making it a significantly important state for the U.S. to have a supportive government in power. In addition, Iraq may have unused reserves of up to 220 billion barrels of oil, which is enough to supply 98 years of the United States' yearly oil imports of 2003, as reported by the U.S. Energy Department. Iraq is considered by many in the international oil industry to be one of the most valuable resources available globally, and according to Raad Alkadiri, it will serve as the "Klondike" of the twenty-first century. Only fifteen of its seventy-odd oil-rich fields have been developed thus far.¹⁴

The US never followed old-fashioned imperialistic techniques to proceed in the Gulf region. It never aimed for direct control in Iraq. The US always wanted to control oil markets, the supply of oil, and the price of oil. The Iraq War can be termed the outgrowth of decades of strategic calculation and policy decisions about oil.¹⁵

The major motive behind the U.S.'s aim to ouster Hussein's regime was to control Iraq's rich oil market and to hold a hold on the world oil market and prizes. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, shortly before the war, 75% of the people in France, 54% of Germany, and 76% of the Russian people believed that the U.S. wanted to control Iraqi oil.¹⁶

Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan claimed in his biography, "The Age of Turbulence," that U.S. oil interests, not the security

danger posed by WMD, were the main motive of the Iraq War. A goal of Saddam Hussein's, according to Mr. Greenspan, was to control the flow of oil into the Middle East through the strategic Straits of Hormuz, which connect the Gulf to the rest of the world. He claims that the Western nations would have been hit very hard if Saddam could have done it. The former leader of Iraq could have easily disrupted the global industrial sector by stopping the production of 5 million barrels of oil per day.¹⁷

So, analysing the statements and statistics, it is evident that the principal aim of the US remains to oust the Saddam Hussein regime, not to promote democracy or human rights or tackle security threats. Still, it is about the oil interests that were at stake during Hussein's regime. Ousting Hussein and bringing a puppet government of the US would eventually serve the US interests in the Middle East and especially the world oil market.

Pressure of Israeli Lobby

The significant role of the Israeli lobby is also not discussed widely in the literature. By analysing the tussle between Saddam Hussein and Israel, it is evident that the US and Israel found their mutual enemy in the name of Saddam Hussein. There has been significant lobbying of the Israeli people in the US government. According to Mark Rupert and Scott Soloman, the Bush administration's foreign policy is primarily dominated by the Zionist Lobby's extremist wing and the oil/arms lobby.¹⁸ Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer also confirm that the role of the Israeli lobby by stating that,

*"The overall thrust of U.S. policy in the region is due almost entirely to U.S. domestic politics, and especially to the activities of Israel Lobby."*¹⁹

Walt and Mearsheimer believe that the United States' foreign policy is influenced by a loose coalition of pro-Israel groups and individuals. American Jews make up the bulk of the Lobby and work tirelessly to sway US foreign policy in support of Israel's agenda. Voting for pro-Israel candidates, participating in letter-writing campaigns, contributing financially, putting pressure on Congress and the Senate, and supporting pro-Israel organisations are the core actions of the Lobby. They support the party's aggressive and expansionist policies.²⁰

Although there is no concrete proof connecting Iraq to the 9/11 attacks, a public statement issued by the major neoconservatives and their allies on

September 20th stated that the ousting of Hussein's regime from power in Iraq should be the top priority of any thorough counterterrorism plan. The letter went on to say that the most reliable friend of America for its counterterrorism measures will always be Israel.²¹ The letter significantly stated that,

*"Even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the 9/11 attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Israel has been and remains America's staunchest ally against international terrorism."*²²

All these statements from the pro-Israel lobby in America show the level of pressure it exerts on the US foreign policy decision-making. There has been an important role of Israel lobby in the US for the Iraq War. The major motive for ousting the Saddam Hussein regime was indeed the motive of Israel more than America itself.

International Law Perspective

From the perspective of International Law, the U.S. intervention in Iraq can be seen from two major perspectives: the Iraq War as a violation of the UN Charter and Principle of Sovereignty, the inappropriate use of Preemptive Self-Defense, and the rhetoric of humanitarian intervention to conceal its realpolitik ambitions.

Violation of the UN Charter and Sovereignty

The U.S. Invasion of Iraq in 2003 raised concerns over the embedded legal principles of the UN Charter, particularly Article 2(4), which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any state except in the case of self-defence or authorised by the UN Security Council.²³ The U.S. invasion, irrespective of the absence of UN authorisation for the invasion, shows the limitations of the international institutions in restraining the actions of states, particularly the powerful states. Such a U.S. invasion raised questions that disregarded Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and challenged the UN's effectiveness in restraining states from achieving their realpolitik-driven pseudo-interventions.

From a realpolitik perspective, the U.S. intervention in Iraq, despite the UN opposition, is indicative that the national interests surpass the international legal obligations in foreign policy decision-making. The critics of the intervention argue that the U.S. has discursively interpreted international law in its own strategic interests, mainly focused on its influence in the Middle East. Such selective use of international law has been termed ‘pseudo-legalism’, where the powerful states manipulate legal language to legitimise their actions. Hence, the Iraq War has been major evidence of the impracticality of International law, as situations where the global power dynamics are unbalanced, international law can be manipulated and used in the interests of the state quite easily.

In its legitimisation of the intervention, the U.S. used the doctrine of preemptive self-defence as a basis for the justification of the invasion. U.S. officials had vocally used the rhetoric of WMDs to securitise the issue and portray it as a threat to global peace. With such rhetoric, the U.S. legitimized its intervention in Iraq to the global world as well as the public.

Doctrine of Preemptive Self-Defense

The cornerstone of the U.S. justification for the Iraq invasion became the so-called preemptive self-defence. The claim was based on the rhetoric created by the U.S. of a perceived threat to its security from Iraq in the form of WMDs. Article 51 of the UN Charter allows states the right to self-defence in response to an armed attack, also interpreted to preclude preemptive strikes. Whereas the invasion of Iraq was beyond the preemptive strikes that were more prone towards preventive or anticipatory self-defence, expanding the interpretation of Article 51, claiming that the potential for Iraq to develop and use WMDs constitutes a sufficient threat to justify the military action in Iraq. The stance of the U.S. shows a significant departure of the U.S. from the established legal norms, leading towards the fragile interpretation of self-defence in international law.

This notion of preemptive self-defence interpreted by the U.S. was met with criticism from the international community, as it broadened the circumstances of the use of lawful military force. Such use of military force also undermined the security framework established by the UN, which is more prone to deterring any aggressor state with collective action rather than unilateral decisions.

One of the major issues behind the invocation of preemptive self-defence in Iraq by the U.S. was that the U.S. lacked sufficient evidence to launch a military activity of such a scale. The Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, when asked about the absence of sufficient evidence, said, “*The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.*”²⁴ Especially, when later on, the Bush administration’s claims about WMDs were discredited, it came into immense critique from the scholars as well as it cast doubt on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the preemptive self-defence as a tool for maintaining security or a mere tool of the major powers to interpret and manipulate.

Along with bypassing the UN Charter’s principles and the reinterpretation of self-defence, the Bush administration also utilised the concept of ‘Humanitarian Intervention’ to legitimise and justify its military activity in Iraq.

Humanitarian Intervention as a Pseudo-Intervention

The U.S., along with championing the discourse of preemptive self-defence, also used the concept of humanitarian intervention to legitimise its cause. The Bush administration presented the U.S. as the champion and protector of human rights and democracy worldwide. They framed the intervention as a means to liberate the Iraqi population from the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein and to promote the ideals of democracy in Iraq. In the 2003 State of the Union address by President George W. Bush, he vocally said that one of the major reasons behind the intervention in Iraq was to free the people of Iraq from the Saddam Hussein regime’s brutality.²⁵

However, the arguments about the humanitarian intervention were secondary to the strategic interests of the U.S., which were to grab the oil reserves of Iraq and to overcome the grievances of the Israeli lobby in the U.S. The narrative of WMDs was the most prominent sold narrative as the time period was very crucial because of the securitised society the world had been in since 9/11, particularly the U.S. Hence, this type of narrative, portraying Iraq as a substantial threat, was the most appealing one. Colin Powell’s address to the UN was majorly focused on the justification of Iraq having WMDs and posing a substantial threat to global peace and security. This humanitarian perspective is mostly used as a backup tool and came into the academic

literature after no evidence of WMDs was seen, and it had been quite evident that it was a built-up discourse of the U.S.

Conclusion

The research analyses the motives behind the US intervention in Iraq and its legal perspective. Iraq War, an eight-year-long war, was based on the rhetoric of falsehoods. The research deconstructs the popular discourse of WMD and Democratization used as a pseudo-motive to accomplish their real motives. There had been popular support for these narratives before the war began; the majority of the people believed in Iraq having WMD and even its role in the 9/11 attacks. So, the discourse was a success in the context of the US. However, it lost its support after some time, as people started to know the actual oil motives and the pressure of the Israeli lobby being the prominent reasons for intervention.

The study examines the so-called scholarly debate on whether the intervention was about the security threat of WMD or about democratization efforts. However, the research highlights that both reasons were pseudo-reasons for avoiding the debate on actual reasons. Basically, democratisation was also used by the US to hide its oil interests and the motive of the Israeli lobby to oust the Hussein regime.

Iraq, a country with the second highest world oil reserves in 2002, was indeed the victim of its natural resource capabilities. The US never wanted to control the oil itself; it always needed a puppet in the region to control the world oil market and prices. Ousting Saddam Hussein was indeed important to pave the way for a US-backed government in Iraq. The importance of Iraqi oil has been explained through various statements from US officials.

In the context of Israel, Mearsheimer and Walt have rightly expressed the role of the pro-Israel lobby in US foreign policy. It plays an imminent part in the decision-making process of the US, especially under the Biden administration. In 1998, during the Clinton administration, these pro-Israel lobbyists sent letters expressing their disinfection with the Hussein regime. They wanted to oust the Hussein regime at any cost.²⁶

Whereas, from the perspective of International law, the U.S. tends to legitimize and justify its stance as a preemptive act of self-defence and humanitarian intervention in Iraq. But, because of the lack of evidence of

WMDs, the services of the U.S. in Iraq do not reflect their ambitions as stated on the international stage.

Overall, the US has used the tactic of Pseudo-Interventionism to hide its oil interests and the influence of the Israeli lobby. It has also tried to flourish its image as an advocate of democracy and human rights while ensuring peace and stability in the world. This shows that the US uses the liberal international norms to its advantage to wrap up its rational interests.

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