

How to Avoid Unnecessary Wars – Use Your Intelligence!

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Given the failure to find weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq, it is appropriate to revisit the logic of those strategists who correctly argued *prior to the invasion of Iraq* that a war or invasion was »unnecessary«. Based on Open Source Intelligence (OSI) and deterrence logic, the position that the war was unnecessary flows from the theory that Saddam Hussein was sane and would not use WMDs against a nuclear state; and that even if Saddam Hussein was insane, he had no WMDs and so was no threat. International relations scholars such as John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt used these logical parameters to conclude that the war was unnecessary; or at least that the reasons stated by the US provided no justification.

Deterrence logic would have served the George W. Bush administration far better than its shallow strategy of abandoning realist logic, dismissing its deterrence-theory components and pursuing the war on Iraq anyway. This is the logic that should have been employed by the »Coalition of the Willing«: these governments and certain sections of the intelligence community seem poorly trained in the security logic of realism and its core component-notion of deterrence. In light of recent failures, the intelligence community must remedy this.

Claims Supporting the Iraq War

Deterrence is premised on a psychological tactic whereby a nation state makes credible threats to use massive force in order to deter an attack from another nation state.¹ During the Cold War many international relations realists considered the »balance of power« to be the key to main-

1. John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 23.

taining world peace and at the core of this notion was the effectiveness of deterrence and containment theory. The greatest deterrent in the many models of deterrence theory is considered to be the ability of one state to annihilate another. The desire of the weaker state to ensure its survival (or a dictator's survival) curbs its aggression toward the vastly more powerful state.

Leading up to the war, the George W. Bush camp claimed that deterrence had been tried but had failed against Iraq. Kenneth Pollack in supporting a pre-emptive attack on Iraq went so far as to claim that Saddam Hussein was »unintentionally suicidal«.² By this logic, the use of force against Iraq was arguably *a last resort*. Given that war as a last resort is a core notion of realism Pollack may argue that Bush has adhered to deterrence logic. Michael Mandelbaum, author of »The Ideas that Conquered the World«, claimed that deterrence and containment worked against the Soviet Union only because 400,000 US and allied troops were stationed in Germany.³ Thus we should not overstate deterrence.⁴

Besides, advocates of an attack on Iraq claimed that Saddam Hussein had defied numerous UN resolutions and demonstrated that he would not comply with international law. The Bush camp claimed that Iraq harbored terrorists and that Saddam might furnish terrorists such as Osama bin Laden with WMDs. Furthermore, it was argued that a successful war against Iraq could trigger a wave of democratic reform in the Middle East and in the so-called Axis of Evil countries.⁵

In sum, to support the pre-emptive strike against Iraq it was claimed that deterrence had failed, and in any event that deterrence does not work on madmen. Yet to substantiate this claim that the war on Iraq was a last

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2. John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, Can Saddam Be Contained? History Says Yes (November 12, 2002), Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, 2; Kenneth Pollack, »Why Iraq Can't Be Deterred«, *New York Times* (September 26, 2002).
 3. National Public Radio (USA), Analysis: Experts disagree on whether containment would work in Iraq, recorded February 12, 2003, <http://www.npr.org; 20.4.2003>.
 4. With all due respect, Mandelbaum's view can be dismissed in a footnote. The US response to the Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrates the effectiveness of deterrence theory and practice outside the European theatre. Also, Iraq, even with a small WMD arsenal, lacks mutually assured destruction (MAD) and is lacking in intercontinental ballistic missile technology.
 5. George W. Bush, 2002 State of the Union Address, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (April 20, 2003). The »Axis of Evil« states are Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

resort, the factual matrix of Saddam Hussein's regime and recent examples of comparable quality needed to be examined in a politically neutral assessment. This never occurred on a serious level, and resulted in an unnecessary war fuelled by political agendas rather than serious security logic.

Insights from Realist Analysis: Saddam Could Be Deterred

Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq from July 1979. After that, he was involved in the Iran-Iraq war in 1980–88, invaded Kuwait in 1991, did not fully comply with all demands made in the Gulf War 1990–91 and arguably had not complied with US demands made before the 2003 conflict. However, the following arguments demonstrate that the invasion of Iraq was an unnecessary war and that the Bush Administration abandoned realism and its requirement of deterrence to pursue the war.

Firstly, the Iran-Iraq war could hardly be viewed by the George W. Bush Administration as an irrational or unnecessary war. The US, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and France all supported Saddam Hussein during this conflict.⁶ The Iraqi attack on Iran on September 22, 1980 was a response to a significant threat posed by Iran which was militarily stronger and had instigated border conflicts. Iraqi efforts at deterrence had proved ineffective and lacked credible military »annihilation« strength. The Ayatollah Khomeini was set on expanding revolutionary Islam to Iraq and the region as a whole. Intelligence indicated that Iran was set to assassinate senior Iraqi officials and Khomeini's propaganda was encouraging the Kurdish minority in Iraq to destabilize the country. The war was horrific in its cruelty but was not an attempt at regime change nor was it irrational. In fact, the U.S. supported Iraq during this conflict.⁷

The belief that the enemy is suicidal and/or irrational is an argument for a pre-emptive strike, in contrast to the realist argument of war as a last resort: genuine madmen will not heed the risk of potential annihilation.

6. John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, Can Saddam Be Contained? (footnote 2), p. 4.

7. John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, »An Unnecessary War«, *Foreign Policy* (Jan–Feb 2003), p. 4. Apart from conventional weapons aid and intelligence sharing with Iraq, the Reagan administration allowed and facilitated Iraq's efforts to import and develop anthrax, West Nile virus, and botulinum toxin.

Yet if Saddam Hussein was insane and/or irrational why was no account taken of this when the US were arming him during the Iran-Iraq war? If Saddam Hussein was mad the US could have calculated that, at a later date, he might well attack an ally and perhaps back terrorism in the near future.

Saddam Hussein did use chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq conflict but this cannot be used as evidence that he would have used WMD against the US because Iran did not possess an arsenal capable of annihilating Iraq.⁸ This point is crucial to an understanding of the effectiveness of deterrence theory: Iraq did not use chemical weapons against a superpower capable of destroying it.

Secondly, the Kuwait invasion on August 2, 1990 breached international law. However, in the circumstances it was not irrational. After eight years of funding the costly war against Iran, Iraq suffered a severe economic downturn. Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government took the view that Kuwait owed Iraq ten billion US dollars and should write off Iraq's debts because vulnerable Kuwait had benefited from the security blanket provided by Iraq's effective restraint of the expansionist Iranian regime and should compensate or reimburse Iraq accordingly.⁹ Furthermore, Kuwait was producing oil beyond OPEC's quotas and this exacerbated the damage to the Iraqi economy.¹⁰ Saddam Hussein's diplomacy with Kuwait had proved ineffective in securing compensation and thus to some extent the invasion of Kuwait served a rational purpose, that is, to restart the Iraqi economy. While in hindsight the invasion of Kuwait seems to have been doomed to failure it must be remembered that Saddam Hussein consulted the US Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, prior to the conflict. The US Ambassador expressed no alarm at the Iraqi intention to invade Kuwait, reiterating that the US had no security arrangement with Kuwait.¹¹ With US resistance out of the equation (in accordance with Saddam's plan) Iraq's response was not irrational. Deterrence was not tried by the US before the Kuwait invasion despite being fore-

8. UN Resolution 582 (1986), *The Situation Between Iran and Iraq*.

9. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, Can Saddam Be Contained? (footnote 2), p. 4. The Iran-Iraq war cost the two protagonists over one million casualties and at least 150 billion dollars.

10. Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), pp. 254–6.

11. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, Can Saddam Be Contained? (footnote 2), p. 5.

warned. It is therefore erroneous to use the Kuwait invasion as evidence that Saddam Hussein could not be deterred.

Thirdly, the Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) in 1991 was an aggressive conflict not preceded by any legitimate attempt at deterrence. US diplomacy was non-existent after the invasion of Kuwait. Apart from the significance of the Glaspie incident discussed earlier, Saddam Hussein was obviously aware that he was no match for the US and its allies. It is significant that Iraq had strongly indicated its intention to comply with UN Resolutions 660 and 662 to withdraw from Kuwait.¹² More to the point, the Gulf War withdrawal is evidence that Saddam was deterred when confronted with the threat of overwhelming military assault by the US. Once again, when history is read in context it demonstrates that deterrence theory did apply against Saddam. Iraq did withdraw and did not resort to the use of WMD against Israel or the US. The actual military force used by Iraq was merely a gesture to avoid Saddam being written off as a weak touch in the face of US imperial power.

A crucially important tactic in ensuring conflict in the first Gulf War was the lack of opportunity given Iraq to withdraw on neutral terms by demanding an immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. The US complicated this ultimatum with the demand that Saddam leave all military equipment behind. This inflexible ultimatum placed Saddam in a dilemma: he could not withdraw without losing face to a loathed imperial power. Thus to some extent it could be calculated that Saddam would not comply entirely and would use conventional means in an attempt to inflict several thousand US casualties in the hope that he might be able to negotiate an honorable retreat.¹³

Iraq fired conventionally armed SCUD missiles at both Saudi Arabia and Israel whilst retreating. Yet, if Saddam were truly a madman (and therefore not susceptible to deterrence because irrational) surely he would have resorted to chemical and biological weapons. It seems that deterrence in the form of a US nuclear strike was sufficient to curb Saddam in the first Gulf War.

In passing it must also be noted that no negotiator would seriously contend that insisting upon an unconditional climbdown from an invad-

12. Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander (footnote 10), pp. 308–10. UN Resolution 660 (1990) of 2 August 1990; UN Resolution 662 (1990) of 9 August 1990.

13. Daryl G. Press, »The Myth of Air Power in the Persian Gulf War and the Future of Warfare«, *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall 2001), pp. 15–16.

ing state in a region as volatile as the Middle East would be effective in securing immediate compliance to withdraw peacefully.

Fourthly, in his propensity to violence, Saddam was no worse than many of his regional neighbors. Egypt fought six wars between 1948 and 1973; Mearsheimer and Walt claim that Egypt played a crucial role in starting four of them. Israel has initiated war on three occasions,¹⁴ has been in breach of international law since 1967, and is responsible for assaults on Palestinian civilians.¹⁵ If Saddam was as irrational as those endorsing a pre-emptive strike insisted, Iraq would surely have been vastly more belligerent than its neighbors. Iraq should also have had a far worse human rights record than its regional neighbors. Saddam is responsible for massive and widespread human rights violations, but the same is true of other governments in the region, for example, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Conversely, Iraq was considered, *by regional comparison*, socially progressive as a welfare state.

Fifthly, in February 1998 the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan negotiated an agreement with Iraq to resume weapons inspections. In quid pro quo terms, Iraq received promises that the UN would consider removing economic sanctions. Inspections continued until August 1998, when Iraq withdrew its cooperation with the weapons inspectors, claiming that the UN had not moved towards lifting sanctions. There is evidence that the UN was taking an extraordinary amount of time to lift sanctions which were devastating the Iraqi people. However, the 1998 agreement once again illustrates that diplomacy could draw concessions from Saddam Hussein. Saddam did not resort to blackmail by threatening to use WMDs to get sanctions lifted.

Sixthly, how likely is it that Saddam would have supplied Osama Bin Laden with WMDs? Prior to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, bin Laden was warning the Middle East that Saddam was going to invade and offered to use his army to fight Saddam after Saudi Arabia was attacked.¹⁶ On February 11, 2003, Reuters published a message believed to be from the

14. The three interstate attacks initiated by Israel are the Suez War 1956, the Six Day War in 1967, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on June 6, 1982.

15. UN Press release GA/9793, General Assembly Demands End to Violence in Occupied Palestinian Territory: Urges Action To Implement Sharm El-Sheikh Accord, October 20, 2000.

16. Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Orion Publishing, 2001), pp. 84–86.

fugitive Osama bin Laden warning Arab nations against supporting a war against Iraq (as threatened by the US), and branding Saddam Hussein an infidel.¹⁷ If this intelligence is to be believed then there is little reason to fear that Saddam would supply bin Laden with WMDs. On the contrary, bin Laden wanted to kill Saddam Hussein.¹⁸

Similar analysis demonstrates how unlikely it is that Saddam would arm other terrorist organizations with WMDs.¹⁹ Unlike Khomeini and Osama bin Laden, Saddam was not a religious fundamentalist, but a secular leader. Iraq had at times harbored terrorist organizations but had traditionally shown little aggression towards the US.²⁰ Thus, unless US pressure led radical fundamentalists and Saddam to form a coalition then Saddam was unlikely to fund state terrorism or independent terrorist organizations that by their very nature despise secularism. Furthermore, Saddam was a realist; as such, deterrence theory dictated that Saddam would fear that any WMD transfer to terrorists might be detected.²¹ This would expose Iraq to total destruction from the US. Realism dictates that a rational Saddam would not facilitate WMD arms transfers to terrorists.

Lessons to Be Learned

Mearsheimer and Walt argue lucidly that if during the Cold War the USSR could be contained and deterred by means of mutually assured destruction (MAD) then the unilaterally assured destruction (UAD) of Iraq would surely have been a greater deterrent to Iraq and Saddam Hussein.²² There is simply no substantive evidence to the contrary.

17. Samia Nakhoul, Bin Laden Labels Saddam an Infidel, Al Jazeera TV, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0211-11.htm> Reuters Ltd (April 15, 2003). AWSE, »Bin Laden« calls for Iraqi resistance (reported on February 12, 2003), <http://news.awse.com/12-Feb-2003/Politics/17591.htm> (April 15, 2003).

18. Scott Ritter and William Rivers Pitt, *War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You To Know* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002), p. 45.

19. Ibid., pp. 23–40.

20. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, Can Saddam Be Contained? (footnote 2), p. 1.

21. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, »An Unnecessary War« (footnote 7), p. 7.

22. James M. Lindsay and Michael E. O'Hanlon, »Correspondence: Limited National and Allied Missile Defense«, *International Security*, No 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 190f.

It would not have been difficult to contain and deter Saddam Hussein; he was neither powerful nor aggressive enough to go his own way.²³ There was no need to conquer and occupy Iraq to ensure that Iraq did not acquire or use WMDs as Saddam would almost certainly never have attacked the US with WMDs, whereas the US has demonstrated that it is willing to destroy Iraq. The only foreseeable action that may have resulted in Saddam using WMDs (assuming he had them in 2003–2004) would be in response to US efforts at regime change or serious efforts to take Saddam's life. No WMDs have been found in Iraq so far. Furthermore, when Saddam Hussein was finally caught in his spider hole in Adwar, about 15 kilometers (nine miles) from Tikrit, no remote WMD detonating device was found with him.

The Bush camp claimed that deterrence would not work as Saddam was too irrational. This claim has been proved to be unfounded despite the continuing propaganda by apologists for the intelligence blunder. In conclusion, serious analysis of the situation clearly suggested that the war on Iraq was unnecessary. All that was required was that the evidence be viewed without a political agenda.

There are real lessons to be learned from the failure to locate WMDs in Iraq relating to the intelligence that was ignored or inappropriately discounted in the gathering and assessment process. Reforms based on promoting accuracy of outcomes must acknowledge the merits of macro-security analysis; they must value OSI and strive to promote apolitical agencies. These lessons once learnt, it will at least be possible to make a rational assessment of the threat posed to vastly stronger (especially nuclear) states, such as the USA, by non-nuclear states.

In an era of politically motivated pre-emptive strikes, deterrence theory may be in danger of becoming a relic of the past. Yet the contrary may also be true. As history illustrates, multi-billion-dollar intelligence errors and illegal invasions are difficult to justify to the voting masses, to other nations and to the UN Secretary-General. History teaches us that when dictators are sane and therefore can be deterred, war is unnecessary; in such circumstances only irrational fear would advocate war.

23. National Public Radio (USA), Interview: John Mearsheimer discusses the policy of containment and how it should be applied by the US with regard to Saddam Hussein (February 9, 2003), National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.com>; April 18, 2003.