Iraq

PS 142A.16
Summary

- At its core, the war was caused by a problem of credible commitment
- Shattered U.S. legitimacy
  - Unilateralism v. multilateralism
  - Preventive war
- U.S. failed to anticipate the costs of rebuilding a new state after toppling the old
- Statebuilding efforts failed in Iraq for the same reason as elsewhere — the dilemma
Lead-up to the Iraq War

- After Persian Gulf War, UN weapons inspectors destroy WMD
  - Inspectors leave in 1998 with unresolved questions
- On-going “no fly” zones in North and South of Iraq
- Iraq Liberation Act (Oct. 1998) declares removing Saddam Hussein to be official policy
  - U.S. neoconservatives issue appeal in 1998 to remove Hussein from power
- Intensified sanctions but growing humanitarian crisis
  - Fear that international community would fracture with evidence of increasing deaths and malnutrition
Lead-up to the Iraq War

- Soon after 9/11, renew calls for invading Iraq as part of Global War on Terror.
  - On 9/11, Rumsfeld pens note “best info. fast. Judge whether good enough hit Saddam Hussein at same time. Not only Osama bin Laden”
- Oct. 2002 U.S. Congress passes “Iraq Resolution” authorizing president to “use any means necessary”
  - Passes House 297-133 (3 not voting) and Senate 77-23
- UNSC Res. 1441 (Nov. 2002) returns inspectors to Iraq under threat of “serious consequences” for non-compliance
  - No evidence of WMD or revival of WMD programs
Effort at the UN

- Secretary of State Colin Powell appears at UN in Feb. 2003 to present evidence of ongoing WMD programs
- U.S. seeks “second” resolution authorizing use of force. In face of certain vetoes from France and Russia, withdraws resolution and claims authority under Res. 1441
The U.S. leads a “coalition of the willing” against Iraq. Britain is the only major ally to participate. Fighting begins on 3/20/2003, with air strikes on suspected hiding places of Saddam Hussein.
Why War?

- Causes of war both many and insufficient
  - Rumsfeld: Military transformation
  - Neocons: Political transformation
  - Primacists: Affirmation of U.S. power
    - Karl Rove: “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we make our own reality”
  - WMD and threat to regional stability

- Cheney’s one-percent doctrine
  - If there is a one percent chance of the unimaginable coming true, act as if it's a certainty
  - It's not about “our analysis,” it's about “our response”
Commitment problems arise when states cannot credibly promise not to use force in the future.

Promises are credible only when they are in the self-interest of actors to carry out.

Commitment problems likely when:
- bargaining over issues that affect future power
- there are first strike advantages
Iraq War: Commitment Problem

- Given the shift in bargaining leverage that would arise if Iraq’s WMD programs came to fruition, and Hussein’s continuing misrepresentation of those programs, U.S. decided to wage preventive war.
  - Cheny: “There is no question about who is going to prevail…it is going to be cheaper and less costly to do now than it will be to wait a year or two…until he’s developed even more deadly weapons…”
  - Compared to Clinton administration, Bush team more skeptical about Hussein.
  - Very little Hussein could have done by fall 2002 to convince the Bush administration that it would not develop WMD at some future date.
But Wait, Why Not Capitulate?

- U.S. signaled its intent to go to war, and there was no doubt about the likely outcome
  - Saddam might have been optimistic, but outcome of full-scale war was not in doubt
- If U.S. concerned about WMD, why did Saddam not throw open his facilities to inspectors?
- Saddam concerned about his domestic opposition
  - The possibility that he had WMD deterred insurrections
- Balancing external threat v. internal threat
The War Ends?


On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush declares that major combat operations in Iraq are over. Yet, 97 percent of U.S. casualties have yet to occur.
Civil War in Iraq

- Bush administration wholly unprepared for the outbreak of sectarian violence
- Initial plan calls for US troop withdrawals starting August 2003
- The destruction of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra in February 2006 is a low point.
Sequence of the War

Casualties and Coalition Troop Strength, May 2003-2015

Factions in Iraq
Blinders

- Bush: It is “unlikely there would be internecine warfare between the different religious and ethnic groups”
- Wolfowitz: Postwar force requirements will be low because “there’s been none of the record in Iraq of ethnic militias fighting one another.”
Statebuilding

- Packer: “If there was never a coherent postwar plan, it was because the people in Washington who mattered never intended to stay in Iraq.”

- Bolton: The administration’s only mistake was not turning the country over the Iraqis earlier, giving them “a copy of the Federalist Papers,” and saying “good luck.”
Statebuilding

- Idea was to parachute in the Iraqi exiles and place them — notably Ahmed Chalabi — in power.
- When it became clear Iraqis would not defer to the exiles, U.S. created Iraqi Governing Council
- Quickly displaced by Paul Bremmer’s arrival and the creation of the Coalition Provisional Authority, through which U.S. claimed sovereignty over Iraq
Following the liberal script, Bremmer carried out a plan for quick transition to democracy

- Sovereignty returned and interim government formed June 2004
- National elections for constitutional convention (January 2005) and new constitution (Oct. 2005)
- Elections for national assembly (Dec. 2005)
- Government finally seated May 2006
  - Nouri al-Malaki as Prime Minister
Statebuilder’s Dilemma

- Malaki selected by U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the best of a bad lot of potential PMs

- Lacking any political base of his own, Malaki immediately turned to consolidating his own political support
  - Relied exclusively on Shia groups rather than a broader coalition as desired by the U.S.; this strengthened the hand of Sunni insurgents
  - Diverted U.S. aid and military training to his own militia

- Yet, lacking an alternative, the U.S. stood by Malaki no matter what
The End?

- Resisting U.S. pressure, Malaki turns inward to his own coalition and eventually forms an alliance with Iran.
- Demands that the U.S. withdraw its troops, insisting on conditions for SOFA it knew the U.S. could not accept.
  - Without agreement, Bush announces withdrawal at end of current SOFA.
- President Obama refuses to concede, and withdraws all U.S. forces in December 2011.
The Second Failure of the Iraqi State

- Violence spins out of control after U.S. departure
  - Malaki becomes even more partisan
- Sunnis fear Shia regime; welcome/allow ISIS to operate from territory
- ISIS conquers one-third of the country in summer 2014
The End?

- In new elections in April 2014, Malaki’s political party wins the most seats
  - U.S. interjects itself into negotiations for new government, refusing to back Malaki
  - Haider al-Abadi finally assumes office Sept. 2014; from same party as Malaki
- U.S. troops (~5000) return in Jan. 2015
Turnover

- Al-Abadi steps down in difficult election in October 2018
- Adil Abdul-Mahdi appointed Prime Minister. After weeks of violent protests, resigns in November 2019 — still serving as caretaker.
- Net result is continuing internal political instability where weak Shia leaders have turned increasingly to Iran for support.
Conclusion: Iraq War Ends Hopes for a New World Order

- Western alliance shattered
  - Allies refuse to legitimate preventive war
- Demonstrates futility of statebuilding
  - Obama administration refuses to become involved in Libya and Syria, opts for “stability” in Egypt
  - Trump administration withdraws forces from Syria and Afghanistan while continuing indirect rule through autocrats