

# Political Economy of US Invasion of Iraq

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## Abstract

This paper adds to the ongoing debate on United States invasion of Iraq in the wake of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper which adopts the theory of social production and reproduction, argues the United States invasion of Iraq was motivated and sustained by the economic interest of Anglo- American oil conglomerates in the Middle East. The paper relies on secondary data and observation of the U.S foreign policy in the Middle East as well as content and discourse analysis. The paper recommends that research and development institutes around the globe should explore the viability of alternative energy source rather than oil to divert U.S attention in Iraq as the alternative in order to guarantee global peace and security.

**Keywords:** Political economy; United States invasion; Iraq; oil; Middle East

## Introduction

The entity that later become known as Iraq was under the grip of Ottoman Turks by 1648 when the Westphalia treaty established the doctrine of sovereignty as the defining attribute of the modern nation state. The industrial revolution which started in Europe introduced the new capitalist class that exploited human labour for profit. Marx and Engel in their work 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' published in 1848 observed that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. They also noted that a social revolution is inevitable to overthrow the exploitative capitalist class hence in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; World War 1 broke out and the Russian Revolution followed within the war years.

During the World War 1 peace conference, there were demands for the outright annexation of the subject territories of defeated powers- Germany and Turkey. There were also demands for restoration to the defeated powers and for internationalization. Under Article 19 of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany renounced its right over its colonies and Turkey in Article 16 of Lausanne did same. The detached territories were placed under the mandate system in the Article 22 of the League Covenant (Umozurike 2005)

The territories were divided into mandate A, B and C depending on the level of development of each territory. Iraq fell under mandate A controlled by Britain. The British government controlled foreign affairs, secured the inviolability of the territory, observed treaty entered with the consent of the League, guaranteed the freedom of conscience and religion and prevented discrimination on grounds of race, religion and language in Iraq (Umozurike 2005).

Although Iraq had gained independence in 1932, British government maintained a military presence to protect Iraq from Germany and American encroachment (Sohl, 1996). After the Second World War (1938-1945), the European economy (including Britain) busted and paved way for American global economic domination or hegemony. The U.S emerged as a more matured power after World War II than during the inter war period, willing and able to provide global leadership. US dollar overtook the British pounds as the global reserve currency alongside gold and the Marshall plan was launched to provide bilateral aid to destroyed European economy (Cohn, 2010). This paper examines the political as well as economic rationale behind US interventions in Iraq.

## Theoretical Perspective

The paper adopts the theory of social production and reproduction of material wealth which is akin to Marxian method of political economy, namely dialectical materialism (Abalkin, Dzarasov and Kulijov, 1983). The major proponents of this theory include Lenina (1975); Nnoli (1981); Ake (1981); Ogban-Iyam (2005) and Stavrou (2011). Ezeibe (2015) has also popularized this theory. The basic assumptions of the theory are that:

Man must provide himself with food, clothing, shelter and so on to survive. He cannot get all these ready made from nature...Man cannot eat raw meat, it must be cooked first. Even primitive men, before he could wrap himself in an animal's skin, he had to kill the animal, skin it and cure the skin. Thus to subsist, man must produce material goods from objects found in nature. As history matches on, production undergoes changes and develops its forms and means... Lenina, (1978:330-331).

Similarly, Nnoli (1981) remarked that social production and reproduction give character to other human values. Hence people marry or divorce; fight or make peace; socialize or isolate themselves and be polite or rude in order to produce and reproduce themselves. The United States invaded Iraq to produce and reproduce the economic interest of the Anglo-American petrodollar business. Ogban-Iyam (2005:16-17) aptly furthered that:

Those who decide what to produce, when, how and where, by whom and for whom, also control the social production system. They generally have most of what is produced and they are often more satisfied than others within the production system... those who do not decide what to produce, are generally at the end of social production system... they are often not satisfied and they tend to desire to change the system in their own favor... those who chose what to produce also determines who rule.

Those who decide what to produce, when, how and where control the industries. In fact, it is the industrial sector that produces most of the goods and services in the developed capitalist countries because capitalism has generated the greatest wealth and knowledge of science and technology unlike any other mode of production hitherto known to man (Ake, 1981).

In this paper, we emphasized objects of analysis like the relations of production, distribution of natural resources and the attendant crises arising from both the relations of production and the distribution of this resource. These objects of analysis are among the economic indices that had always generated conflict and crises within the Third World countries that have large deposits of the resources and the historic invasion of resource rich nations by the developed capitalist states which depend on the resources for fuel in industrial production. The state becomes the most potent instrument to guarantee sustainable capital accumulation. Production becomes synonymous with power acquisition so that politics equally means of production.

The United States which dominate the world economically also dominate it politically since the post war years. United States wields open influence on who comes to power in other states and who vacates political office across the world. U.S became the policeman of the world and intervenes in domestic affairs of other nation promoting liberal capitalism and democratization as parts of her foreign policy. Again, U.S intervenes in regions where they have economic interest. U.S continually searches for natural resources ranging from gold to diamond and tin to crude oil. These natural resources are crucial to the survival of the U.S economy. In fact, U.S intervenes in Iraq at all ages to secure her oil energy source and keep global price of the product stable under the pretences of fight against global terrorism, democratization and liberalization.

### **Historical Account of Conflict in Iraq**

Modern literature on Iraqi history revealed that more than seven wars have been fought in Iraq within the past century. Meanwhile, these wars were arguably related to struggle to control and own oil fields in the gulf (Tripp 2003 and Kifner, 2003). The first effort to capture the oil fields in Iraq took place during the First World War when Britain had defeated the Ottoman Empire (*London Times, August 2, 1924*). Again, Britain fought war pacification in Iraq between 1918 and 1930 crushing a countrywide insurrection using an occupation army drawn from India another British colony (Paul, 2002). The war kill many and destroyed property worth of millions of dollars hence Churchill concurred that the defense of Iraqi oil deposit is a test of modern weaponry and military colonial use of force (Omissi, 1990).

Meanwhile, Iraq had border dispute with Iran which the Algiers Accord of 1975 had supposedly settled. Following Iranian inability to honour the accord and disorder of Iranian revolution, Saddam invaded Iran in 1981 during the war years Saddam used chemical warfare strategy while Iran applied gas warfare strategy. This war that lasted until 1988 because some foreign government promoted and encouraged the war between the two oil rich countries by providing them with arms and personnel in exchange for oil. United States of America and Britain for instance supported Iraq by supplying arms, chemical and biological weapons, military training and naval support and satellite targeting equipments. Other big powers like France and Japan also supported either one of the sides in pursuit of respective economic interests (Paul 2002).

In 1990, Saddam invaded Kuwait. Following Iraqi's refusal to heed the warnings and directives of Egypt, US and UN to withdraw troops from Kuwait, the allied force led by U.S intervened militarily in February 1991 *Operation Desert Storm*. The US had accused Iraq of having used non conventional weapons in Kuwait and was requested to surrender their stock pile of chemical and biological weapons. Iraqi seems refusal attracted a UN imposed economic sanction of *oil for food* which allowed Iraq to export limited oil to pay for food and medicine. Various states also sanctioned Iraq for refusal to comply with the UN resolutions and directives.

Saddam Hussein had become a threat to global flow of oil and America economic domination hence, Bush (senior) noted that our jobs, our life and freedom around the world would suffer if control of the world greatest oil reserves fall on the hands of Saddam Hussein (*New York Times, August 16, 1990*). Both U.S and

Britain sought the removal of Saddam from office in defense of their interest in Iraq. The Kurds in the oil rich northern Iraq was spoiled to oppose Saddam's authoritarianism. This explains the killing of about 12,000 Kurds by Saddam's troop in Iraq.

### **September 11, 2001 Terrorist attack and US- Iraq relations**

On the morning of September 11, 2001 (9/11), two commercial air liners crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, the third one crashed into the Pentagon House in Washington DC and a fourth one crashed in a field in Pennsylvania killing nearly 3000 people in all. Almost immediately, television news channels carried that the death and destruction was caused by Osama Bin Laden, the leader of transnational terrorist network called Al-Qaeda. Osama reported that he was carrying out a holy war against US for supporting Saudi royal family during the Gulf war and promoting decadent western lifestyle that corrupts and destroys Islamic laws throughout the world (Balaam and Veseth, 2005)

In reaction to 9/11 attack, U.S and the rest of the West reorganized their communication and information system, intensified the protection of businesses and citizens abroad and streamlined air travel and commerce (*New York Times*, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001). The attack proved that the most powerful economy was vulnerable to attacks hence, chemical and biological attacks were envisioned (*Tacoma News Tribunal*, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001). On 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 President Bush (JR.) remarked that every region has to make decision either to be friends or enemies. The President launched a war on terror, Al Qaeda and Talibans in Afghanistan (*World in Review*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002)

A rift emerged between the U.S and European NATO partners over the Bush's assertion that Al -Qaeda was receiving support from Saddam Hussein in Iraq (Balaam and Veseth 2005). By the end of 2002, it had become clear that U.S was prepared to invade Iraq despite warnings from UN and other European power to avoid invasion (<http://www.mideastweb.org/Osamabinladen.1.htm>. retrieved on June 9<sup>th</sup> 2009)

### **Post 9/11 U.S. invasion of Iraq**

In the 1990s Saddam Hussein continued to be a great source of tension in the Middle East. Though George Bush (Sr.) did not pursue Saddam into Iraq after he withdrew from Kuwait at the end of the Gulf war, U.S had not dropped all charges against Iraq. This explained why the administration of Bush (Jr.) quickly linked Iraq with Al-Qaeda in the post 9/11 era.

The U.S in 2002 accused Iraqi regime of having failed to comply with a number of UN Security Council resolutions pertaining to inspection of its weapons facilities in the past 12 years and that Saddam Hussein was building weapon of mass destruction that could be used against U.S, its allies and Israel. Hence, U.S declared war on global terrorism. Most U.S allies did not accept the decision to adopt military measures to deal with Iraq and the U.S accepted to "go it alone" (Balaam and Veselt 2005: 199). When U.S pursued for a resolution to deal with Iraq failed, it caused ripples in the UN Security Council. In the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, U.S abandoned request for UN support and proceeded to invade Iraq on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2003.

Remarkably, Iraq did not use any chemical or biological weapon to defend Baghdad or any other city during the U.S invasion. Saddam merely escaped from Baghdad and two of his sons were killed in a gun battle. Few months later he was arrested. The war was said to have ended on May and an interim government was instituted in Iraq by mid July 2003 though bombing and air raid continued.

Despite the apparent end of war in Iraq, by 2006 war was evident and an Iraqi study group linked the violence to the Israeli -Palestinian conflict. U.S began to send troops to Iraq in order to control the violence and conflict in the Middle East (Retrieved from <http://www.Mideastweb.org/Iraq-study-group-report> 13<sup>th</sup> June 2009).

The emergence of Barack Obama in 2008 as the President of America gave new flavour to the conflict in Iraq as the administration intensified debates for withdrawal of U.S troops from Iraq. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 President Obama announced that the military combat in Iraq is over and directed gradual withdrawal of U.S troop (CNN News Report September, 1 2010). The Iraqi Prime Minister proclaimed Iraq sovereign and independent in his national address to mark the end of U.S combat mission in Iraq. The Prime Minister praised the law enforcement agencies for their commitment in fighting terrorism (Business day, Thursday September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010).

### **Oil and Us Foreign Policy in Iraq**

The history of U.S foreign policy dates back to 1776. Ogwu (2005:6) rightly noted that "foreign policy deals with the relationship between two independent actors in the international system". Meanwhile foreign policy of a nation and the national interest of such a nation are dialectically related. Hence, Okolie (2009:11) succinctly put that "national interest is at the root of foreign policy making. Meanwhile the term national interest is very nebulous and fraught with plethora of meanings, interpretations and abuses".

Padleford (1976) observed that national interest seek to protect the core values of the society. Although regimes may change in U.S, her foreign policy remains to protect her energy source (oil) for industrial production and profit. U.S oil interest is permanent but her friends change with time. For instance, the U.S government supported the Iraqi military action against her neighbours in the 1980s but opposed vehemently Iraqi occupation of Kuwait to secure her economic interest (oil fields in Kuwait).

In the post 9/11 era, U.S foreign policy of preemption had regained prominence to guarantee the security of U.S oil blocs in the Middle East especially oil fields in a terrorist state like Iraq hence, the U.S unilateral war against global terrorism was around Iraq. Though U.S foreign policy has faced both domestic and international criticism as regards to the place of oil, the foreign policy agenda of the U.S Department of States is to create a more secured democratic and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people and the international community ([http://www.cia.gov/library/publication/the\\_world\\_factbook/rank\\_order\\_2001\\_rank.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publication/the_world_factbook/rank_order_2001_rank.html). Retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2009). Despite the proclamation impartiality of U.S foreign policy, U.S government have supported oppressive regimes abroad when it served their economic interest and overthrown democratically elected leaders when they do not serve their interests.

However, U.S national interest shapes her foreign policy in any given historical epoch. Meanwhile, U.S protects oil blocs in Iraq for the U.S oil MNCs that pay taxes to U.S government hence; the exploration of oil boosts her economic base. This is because about 90% global transportation system and production engines depend on oil as the major source of fuel and the sands of Iraq hold world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest oil reserve.

Saddam Hussein's acquisition of weapon of mass destruction was not really the rationale for U.S. invasion of Iraq. The real issue was described by Vice- President Dick Cheney in a 2001 report on Energy Security. The report showed that the U.S invaded Iraq to subvert an impending global energy crisis which would leave the U.S with unprecedented energy price volatility. The report saw Middle East, particularly, Iraq as the main source of disruption because the U.S had lost faith in Saddam Hussein (Iraqi dictator) due his erratic and unpredictable energy export policies (Nafeez, 2014).

If Iraq were Rwanda (a country without oil reserves), President Bush would not have invaded the territory. The U.S invasion of Iraq was anchored on preemptive foreign policy which sought to oust out Saddam and prevent him from using the resources to foment trouble in the region. Some of the problems U.S tried to avoid include Saddam Hussein's use of petrodollar influence to undermine U.N. resolutions; spike world oil prices or distort Western solidarity as the French collusion with Saddam attested (Hanson, 2013). Iraq's oil made the nation important and influential in the Middle East, and thus made it the spot where any change would catalyze change elsewhere in the region (Pillar, 2008).

Following the foregoing, Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld suggestion that the accusation that U.S is really after Iraqis oil is nonsense. Despite this remark by Rumsfeld, the importance of Iraqi oil to U.S economy cannot be over emphasized. Though Iraqis oil production fell sharply from 3.5 million to 300,000 barrels per day after her invasion of Kuwait, Iraq had recovered about 2.5 million barrel per day by February 2002. In December 2002, U.S imported about 11.3 million barrels of oil from Iraq ([http:// US.govinfo. about. Com/ library/weekly/ a airaqi\\_oil http](http://US.govinfo.about.com/library/weekly/airaqi_oil.html), retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2010).

The U.S becomes addicted to oil which serves as fuel to drive technological development. Anglo-American oil conglomerates dragged the United States soldiers to war in Iraq to maintain a Western-oriented Iraq which would be an additional source of oil and an alternative to U.S. dependency on an unstable-looking Saudi Arabia (Henderson, 2013). Hence, President Bush (Jr.) favoured oligopoly capitalism, particularly that of firms owned by his supporters rather than free market capitalism.

Of course, Iraq was the alternative source because Iraq had the second highest amount of proven oil reserves in the world behind Saudi Arabia with about 10 percent of the world's oil proven reserves and resources which could satisfy U.S. oil imports for almost a century. Arguably, this invasion of Iraq as an alternative source of oil for the West was motivated by the need to lower the global price of oil and sustain supplies. The U.S invasion of Iraq aimed at profit maximization for American oil companies and not the generality of the citizens.

United States invasion of Iraq was also necessitated by the fact that Iraq started to sell oil for Euros. By selling oil for Euros, it meant that European nations no longer needed dollars to buy oil from Iraq. This was a source of huge crisis both for *American economy and the U.S dollar*. If the U.S has allowed this to continue, other OPEC nations might do the same and this would end the dollar as a world reserve currency and crash its value on the global market. Saddam had to be taken out since he was willing to sell his oil at high prices to Western buyers and his standing among fellow OPEC members was to push the cartel to adopt policies detrimental to U.S oil cartels.

Other nations like Libya and Iran that also attempted to sell oil for currency other than dollars were also resisted by the U.S. For instance, the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi was deposed in October, 2011 and Iran has been involved in subtle war with the U.S.

### Cost of U.S Invasion of Iraq

The U.S. invasion of Iraq was not without a cost. When the United States went to war in Iraq, the price of oil was less than \$25 a barrel, but with the war, prices reached \$140 a barrel by 2008. In the early 2008, Stiglitz & Bilmes (2010) put the total cost Iraq war to the United States at \$3 trillion. This price tag dwarfed previous estimates, including the Bush administration's 2003 projections from \$50 to \$60 billion costs of war. Indeed, citizens of the United States at the dawn of invasion agreed that the invasion of Iraq was oil capitalist interest and economic doom for the rest. This realization manifested in the failure of the Republican Party to win the 2008 Presidential election to succeed President Georg Bush (Jr.). Despite that President Obama (A Democrats) frequently announced the withdrawal of U.S troops from Iraq the region had become a territory of unending cauldron of violence and brutality since the 2003 invasion. The United States continues to act as the Iraqi air force and struggle to train reliable Iraqi army forces.

### Conclusion

The history of U.S invasion of Iraq is the history of pursuit of America capitalist interest which is centered in the Middle East oil. Put simply, U.S invasion of Iraq was a ploy by Washington and London to control Middle East oil. After the Berlin conference in 1884/1885, most European and American states sailed to foreign lands seeking solution to economic contradictions in their domestic economies. They seized these foreign lands, monetized their economies and colonized them. In this process the West discovered certain crucial natural resources for exploitation and expropriation. The discovery of oil in Iraq was both a course and blessing for the Iraqis.

The struggle over the control of these foreign lands and their resources led to the outbreak of the World Wars directly or indirectly. In the post war years, coincidence of natural occurrence led to the independence of some colonies including Iraq.

Regrettably, the Europeans did not let alone Iraq. Britain maintained a permanent military presence in protection of her oil interest after Iraqis independence. In the wake of American global economic hegemony at the end of World War II that destroyed European economies, Britain entered a coalition with US to intervene in Iraq in 1991 during the Gulf war and divided their oil fields.

Subsequently in 2003, this coalition invaded Iraq on fallacious grounds that Iraqi government possesses WMD. After long years of U.S/ Britain occupation of Iraq, no WMD has been found, Saddam has been killed and US favorable government enthroned, U.S troops are yet to poll out of Iraq. Despite the official announcement of President Obama about the end of military combat in Iraq, U.S military boots continue to soil in Iraq. The United States non- negotiable approach to maintain oil flow from the Middle East defeats Schumpeter's thesis that capitalism is rational. It shows that like imperialism, Anglo-American capitalism is crude, irrational and dirigistic. This paper recommends for urgent intensification of research to discover and explore alternative source of energy in order to reduce the heavy Anglo-American reliance on oil that flows from the Middle East as fuel for industries in the West. This will help to reshape U.S foreign policy towards Middle East and Iraq.

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