Persistent Commitment to a Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy Until 2009

Wishful Thinking and Strategic Assumptions

Evert Lafeber

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"It has been said that conservatism at its worst is the habitual resistance to all change, even when the change at issue would benefit those resisting it. If so, then U.S. policy toward Iraq is a perfect example of such conservatism." – Daniel Byman

Supervisor: Dr. N. Schonmann

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Chapter 1

Introduction:
Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy

Throughout its existence, the state of Iraq has been mired in secessionist movements, violent coups, bloodshed, persecution of minorities, and social unrest on a massive scale. Despite this, the international community at large, and the United States (US) in particular, remain steadfast in their support of a unitary Iraq (Nauert 2017, Hennis 2019), never calling into question its territorial integrity. Although it seems politically unacceptable for any external actor to advocate or call into question the existence of another state, it is certainly not without precedent. Consider for example the involuntary dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The death of states is never a stand-alone event, but the result of complex geopolitical dynamics, where these states are often too weak to resist their own demise. The geopolitical dynamics in regards to Iraq, too, have resulted in calling into question its existence by actors both within the US, and the international community at large, on more than one occasion.

I will explore the issue of American foreign policy (FP) towards a unitary Iraq, and work to advance our understanding as to how the idea of a unitary Iraq has become so persistent in American FP. To this end, I will first demonstrate what is problematic about the existence of a unitary Iraq, and why American FP towards a unitary Iraq is puzzling.

1.1 Problematizing the Existence of a Unitary Iraq

When the state of Iraq was officially constituted in 1922 by the British, the Kurds, and the Shiites, were bereft of their own state, and the Sunni minority was elevated to ruling status. The artificiality of the Iraqi state has resulted in continued instability. Before the Ba'athist coup of 1968, Iraq had known some forty uprisings (Byman 1996). At a rate of almost one uprising per year, the heterogeneous state of Iraq has indeed never known stability. The comparative stability that followed the 1968 Ba'athist coup went hand in hand with the repression of mainly the Shiite and Kurdish populations of Iraq, and any political opponent of the Sunni Ba'ath party. In this period, Iraq invaded Iran, and Kuwait, resulting in the deaths of over a million people, countless internally displaced persons (IDPs), and genocidal campaigns to keep the Iraqi Kurds in check. Stability in Iraq, then, came at a cost of countless lives, and a system of repression.

Stability has not returned since the removal of the Ba'ath regime, and it seems unlikely that it will in the future. Since 2003, Iraq has been through civil wars, resulting in the deaths of nearly 300,000 individuals (Iraq Body Count 2019), the rise of *DAESH*[1] that directly threatened the very existence of the country, and a Kurdish referendum for independence, rousing a regional backlash that feverishly sought to hold Iraq together as an overwhelming majority of the Kurds voted in favour of independence. This begs the question: should a state that needs all the help in the world to remain intact, remain so? Is it deserving of statehood? Some observers word their view on the matter in unkind terms. Michael J. Totten called Iraq "[a] cancerous nation on life support (...) [which] is likely to die and we'll all be better off when it does" (Totten 2015). Even as *DAESH* is defeated militarily, at the time of writing, Iraq is seeing large-scale social unrest again, to which the government responds with live ammunition (BBC 2019). The scourge of *DAESH*, and the response to social unrest, makes a mockery of comments by US and Iraqi state officials on Iraq, who have called the country stable, democratic, and self-reliant (Obama and al-Maliki 2011).

1.2 The Enigma of a Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy

The Iraqi military has been aided by Shiite militias through all this turmoil. The most notable of which is Hashd al-Shaabi, a de facto Iranian proxy (Alaaldin 2018). Despite increasing influence of Iran within Iraq (Guzansky 2011, K. M. Pollack 2017, Simpson 2017), the US continues to uphold the importance of a unified, singular Iraq (Nauert 2017, DeYoung and El-Ghobashy 2017), supporting the state of Iraq and the Iraqi military (SIPRI 2019, US AID 2019). Despite the deep animosity between the US and Iran, increasingly so since Donald Trump took office, the bone of Iraq does not seem to be one of contention between the two longstanding adversaries.

Containment of Iranian influence was an important reason for the US to support Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war (Miller and Mylorie 1990, Brigham 2014). An important reason the US did not actively pursue regime change in the subsequent First Gulf War was that regime change in Iraq would only benefit the Iranians, as they would fill the resulting power vacuum (Bush and Scowcroft 1998, Scowcroft 1996). Another reason was that toppling Saddam would bring enormous costs, both in terms of human lives, and money (Powell 1993). Both these arguments have proven to be true following the Second Gulf War, where the Americans

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[1] The Arabic acronym for the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant: *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-ʿIrāq wa-sh-Shām.*

removed Saddam from power. In light of these developments, it seems strange that the US should keep Iraq intact.

Any dissolution of Iraq would entail the creation of an independent Kurdistan, though its creation need not spell the end of Iraq. An independent Kurdistan could be considered to be a reasonable policy option for the US to pursue. Turkey shifts away from NATO as evidenced by its purchasing of Russian weapons systems, and continuing disagreements with the US over policy in Northern Syria (Erkus 2019, U.S. Department of the Treasury 2019), and Iran asserts itself effectively as a regional power (K. M. Pollack 2017). With other geopolitical developments in the region, such as the Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Yemen, and GCC countries' reluctance to alleviate the suffering of refugees (Amnesty International 2014), the potential of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan is enormous for American FP.

Iraqi Kurdistan has been a safe-haven for many refugees that were displaced during the *DAESH* onslaught, and its military has acted as an effective, pro-Western force in the fight against terrorism (Natali 2015). The Kurds are regularly spotted sporting Israeli flags, and the Israelis support the Kurdish bid for independence (Heller 2017). The creation of an independent Kurdistan on the territory of the state of Iraq, would create an Israeli ally overnight. Operating from an independent Kurdistan, or alongside it, would ease the calculations American strategists have to make when they project power into the region. Fears of angering their Arab coalition partners, or its Israeli ally, could largely be circumvented. Acting as a security guarantor for an independent Kurdistan, the US could lease permanent military bases, and reaffirm its military presence in the region. Its military presence in Arab states has often been the source of anger for Arab nationals, and is contingent on political realities. The motivating fear of Iraqi aggression, that prompted Arab states to welcome US troops on their soil, has been removed by the Americans themselves. The US has no guarantee for their sustained presence in the region. An independent Kurdistan could provide such a guarantee. Yet, the US sticks to a unitary Iraq, committing huge amounts of economic resources to that end, costing many lives.

The American efforts to stabilize a unitary Iraq have reached epic proportions. Nearly 300,000 people have lost their lives as a direct result from violent conflict since the Second Gulf War, of which about 8,500 are American, while the US sustained more than an additional 33,000 wounded (Crawford 2018). Direct involvement in Iraq since 2003 has cost

American tax-payers 1.9 trillion USD[2]. *Thus far*. This amount exceeds the total expenditure of the government of Iraq over the same period[3]. In other words: the American tax-payer could have paid all the bills of the Iraqi government without all the bloodletting, and still have money to spare. Surely there is merit in the argument that this money could have been better spent elsewhere.

1.3 Problem Statement: Perpetual Sectarian Violence

Given the exorbitant effort both in terms of human life and economic cost that is continuously needed to hold Iraq together, American policy-makers could have been expected to start looking beyond Iraq's unity, and consider the possibility of making a commitment to its dissolution. Given Iraq's history, and the effort that has already gone into keeping the state intact, the argument that the dissolution of Iraq would be accompanied by enormous cost of human life, and great economic expenditure, becomes moot. Holding it together bears the same fruit. Iraqis, and Americans alike, are victims of the persistence of a unitary Iraq in American FP. The perpetual sectarian violence amongst Iraqis may be alleviated by committing to Iraq's dissolution, and give Iraq's minorities a chance to improve their situation.

The Shiite majority, who occupy the resource-rich areas of Iraq, presently favour a unitary Iraq. But with partition, they would not have to share their revenue with as many Iraqis. The Shiite majority would thus be economically better off; similarly, the Kurds would gain full control over their oil-revenues, making them economically better off, and finally giving them their own long coveted nation-state; the Sunni minority would come out the economic losers, but would escape the vengeful acts of the Shiite majority, and be free to pursue their own system of government. Dividing Iraq along sectarian lines stands a chance

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[2] It is hard to put an exact number on the costs the US has made in Iraq over the years, but we may take an educated guess. A study by the Watson Institute of International & Public Affairs from Brown University has kept track of the costs of war made by the US following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The cumulative total the US has spent on direct war appropriations – meaning military operations and additional Department of Defense (DOD), State Department and USAID costs in terms of emergency or overseas contingency operations – totals 1,878 billion USD from 2001-2017. Of this, 819.1 billion USD, or 43.6%, was spent on Iraq. Owing to their transnational nature, this amount does neither include Operation Noble Eagle, nor Operation Inherent Resolve – which total 25.1 billion USD and 14.3 billion USD respectively in the same period. The figure of 1,878 billion USD is inflated by the same study by the increased base budget allotted to the DOD owing to these wars, veteran spending, interests on borrowing, and spending for the prevention and responses to terrorism as a direct result of these wars. The new total comes to 4,351 billion USD. If the share of the Iraq war including interest etc. is similar to the portion of direct war appropriations, this means Iraq has cost the American taxpayer 1,897 billion USD. For a breakdown of numbers and budgets, see: *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11* (Belasco 2014).
[3] Based on 2019 numbers from the World Bank.

of stopping the bloodshed once and for all, which has marred the state of Iraq since its inception. Such a division could have occurred at a number of junctions in Iraq's history. Such a division could offer the solution to most of Iraq's problems, as the perpetual sectarian unrest, and deep sense of mistrust, prevents the Iraqis from power-sharing agreements. Dividing Iraq, then, would not only provide autonomy for the largest groups within Iraq, but it could also mean an end to the untenable agreements sought in creating a stable, Western ally in the region.

Yet, the United States has never pursued a policy that would result in a disintegrated Iraq. Despite its potential, geostrategic logic, economic savings, and possibility to end the bloodletting, the US sticks to a unitary Iraq. It is against this backdrop that this thesis will focus on the question: *How has the idea of a unified Iraq become so persistent in American Foreign Policy?*, and in effect deconstruct the idea of a unitary Iraq in American FP. Answering this question will help to inform the debate on an independent Kurdistan, which returns to the fore every time Iraq is facing a crisis. It will help situate American FP in a broader regional, and historic context. This, in turn, will provide an understanding why the United States pursues the policies it does, and perhaps allow for a glimpse into when, how, or why it may change in the future. The research will not move beyond the George W. Bush administrations (2001-2009), because a lot of relevant discussions are not available yet beyond these years.

1.4 Methods, Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This research will use qualitative content analysis methods through the theoretical lens of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). This model, from the field of public policy, states that policy will only change when three streams converge: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream. The problem stream is released by so-called 'focussing events'. Focussing events are events that put a problem in the view of the public, and the political arena. In other words: a problem comes to the public fore, warranting a solution. The policy stream pertains to available policy options in the eyes of policy-makers, and are solutions to problems. These policies usually require 'policy entrepreneurs', who are proponents of certain solutions, and are ready to step in once the problem stream is released. These policy entrepreneurs need to be well-connected to political leaders, in order to get their solutions into the political stream. The political stream, then, amounts to the political will to apply a certain solution to a problem. In a functioning, representative democracy, the political

stream is a combination of the will of the political arena, and public demands, and views on the issue through the media. It is thus only when problem, solution, and political will converge, that policy is changed[4].

This theoretical lens will be a helpful analytical tool to distil from the sources how all the streams were looking from an American government's point of view. The theory is more helpful in analyzing the dynamics of American FP than other public policy theories, owing to its broad scope. Other theories, such as the Punctuated Equilibrium – which focuses solely on dramatics actions or a radical change in policy – or Incrementalism – which views change in policy happening as piecemeal changes, are less encompassing. They fail to explain either incremental changes in policy, or radical changes in policy. MSF captures the messy process of policy-making, and reflects policymaking "in the real world" rather than being too theoretical, or abstract (Peters 2018). It helps us understand why policy changes, or why it does not, regardless of the change at hand.

The hypothesis for the central research question – *How has the idea of a unitary Iraq become so persistent in American Foreign Policy?* – flows forth from MSF. The working hypothesis is that a unitary Iraq is so persistent in American FP because of a lack of political will as result of either 'fear of commitment' or 'fear of concession'. I propose these concepts in differing from bad investments and sunk costs, as the latter terms relate solely to economic costs. Fear of commitment, and concession, are not measured in economic cost alone, but have a political, and geostrategic angle as well. Not only do states have their electorate to account to – who can be seen as the share-holders of a company in this analogy – but states also need to consider the international community at large, and their own geostrategic calculus within it. These considerations often supersede a simple cost-benefit analysis in terms of money. Take for example human rights, or the lack of them, and how these can influence inter-state relations, or instigate demonstrations, internal upheaval, or even uprisings. These commitments or concessions, then, potentially have enormous political, and geostrategic ramifications alongside the economic consequences – bad, or good. Owing to the interplay and complexity of these consequences, it is often impossible to calculate the eventual outcome of a commitment or concession, as opposed to business decisions in relation to investments, or the abandonment of sunk costs, which may be quite predictable and calculable.

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[4] For an elaboration on this model, see professor John W. Kingdon's *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Kingdon 2011).

In this thesis, fear of commitment means that the US does not want to commit time, lives and resources to a project they fear will drain too much, in this case the dissolution of Iraq. The expended lives, financial means, and political capital, would simply be deemed too high a cost for the result. Fear of concession, conversely, means that America fears adopting a different strategy after having committed so much to the project. It would mean a loss of political capital as they 'abandon the Arabs', 'let the terrorists win', and effectively concede Iraq to Iran. The preponderance of these fears prevent policy entrepreneurs from advocating the dissolution of Iraq, as this policy option would make matters worse in the eyes of American policy-makers.

1.5 The Research and Its Sources

In order to answer the central research question, three sub-questions have been formulated: (1) *What is the history of a Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy between 1920-1993?* In this background chapter, I will provide a short overview of American interests and actions in Iraq throughout history, relying on secondary sources in the form of academic publications, and primary sources in the form of statements and publications by administration officials. It will familiarize the reader with American FP and interests in Iraq, the history of the idea of a unitary Iraq, as well as sketch that the problem stream in regards to Iraq had been released for decades in the American public debate; (2) *How did the problem, policy and political streams develop over time during the Clinton administrations?* This chapter will look at the evolution of American FP in Iraq during the 1993-2001 Clinton era. I will explain the rise of certain policy entrepreneurs, and highlight their output in the form of the think-tank Project for the New American Century, and the Open Letter to the President which was sent to then President Clinton in 1998 by a host of prominent American FP experts. I will examine these primary sources to show that the stage was being set for a change in policy vis-à-vis Iraq, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks; (3) *What did the policy stream look like during the George W. Bush administrations?* In this chapter, I will examine two prominent documents to determine the consolidation of policy within the policy stream. The first is the Future of Iraq Project, which is a 1200 page document compiled by some 200 Iraqi experts of all creeds, as commissioned by the US government in 2002, to research what policies should be pursued once the US had deposed Saddam Hussein. The second is an 84 page bipartisan report commissioned by the US government in 2006, and was finished the same year. The report aimed to identify problems for Iraq, and solutions to those problems, amidst growing hostilities within Iraq. Examining these two documents will illuminate how

the G.W. Bush administrations looked at the problems in Iraq, and what policy options they deemed feasible. Combining the findings of these chapters will allow for a detailed answer to the central research question of this thesis, by in effect combining the problem stream, policy stream, and political stream spanning several decades.

There are a few caveats to this research. This thesis will in no way be an exhaustive research on the topic of a unitary Iraq in American FP. To properly do so would require extensive coverage of discussions on the topic by cabinet members, and other prominent individuals in the American governmental system. A lot of these discussions are simply not available to the public. Moreover, any exhaustive research on the topic of a unitary Iraq, and why its partition should seriously be considered, cannot forego a study on the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, Kurdish aspirations, international law, Western imperial interests in the region, and Cold War influences. Because each of these topics may warrant a thesis in their own right, the scope of this research will not allow ventures into these topics.

1.6 Literature Review

There is no literature directly dealing with the research question at hand. However, there is plenty published on Iraqi unity, and American FP in Iraq. Rayyan Dabbous, a Lebanese author and director, in an Op-Ed published by Global Research, argues that the partitioning of the country by an outside force ignores the will of Iraqis, and that in effect the US created a problem that was previously not there (Dabbous 2017). However, as mentioned in paragraph one, Iraq has rarely been without violent uprisings, many of which were aiming for secession. The Kurdish struggles and aspirations are well known, and documented: the Kurds have been pursuing a state of their own since the centralization policies of the Ottoman empire (Jwaideh 2006, McDowall 2013, Phillips 2015). Iraqi Shiites, too, have not been without their call for their own state, although they currently prefer a unitary Iraq as their oppression by the Sunnis has stopped since the Shiites themselves came to power, and are effectively dominating the government apparatus (Visser 2005). The fact that the majority of Iraqis currently wish to hold Iraq together is easily countered from a political theory point of view. Although there are many issues to take into account when secession is seriously considered[5], "a right to decide whether another self can enjoy self-determination would make a mockery of the concept" (Philpott Jan., 1995). The project of unifying Iraq has been a constant struggle. Ofra

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[5] Iraqi Kurdistan would fulfil all the requirements laid out by the most prominent scholars on secession. For a concise overview on the topic of secession see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Secession* (Buchanan 2017).

Bengio, who writes extensively on Iraq, quotes British colonial secretary Leo Amery as saying in 1925 that the kingdom of Iraq would fall to pieces, if it weren't for British aeroplanes holding the country together by bombing dissidents. The article where Ofra Bengio quotes Leo Amery shows how for Saddam the unity of Iraq was very much in peril in 1992, by way of increasing Kurdish autonomy and "international conspiracies" (Bengio 1995). This illustrates a constant looming existential threat. This seemingly imminent division of Iraq is reflected in the identity formation of Iraqis. Khalil Osman traces the failure of unity in identity from 1920 to the post-2003 period, by arguing how elites nurtured feelings of political exclusion among sectarian groups (Osman 2014). Other scholars note how a centralized Iraq, in trying to create national unity, inherently infringed on sectarian identities, and provoked an adverse effect as it diminished tribal authority, which was in fact empowered through these sectarian identities (Lukitz 2009). Some people were forced to rely on these sub-national loyalties, because they were excluded socially, professionally, and politically (Albert 2013). Authoritarian Iraqi regimes relied on their own sectarian identities, too, in keeping their circle tight, and ensuring their survival (Brigham 2014, Tripp 2007). The emphasis on these sectarian identities thus served the purposes of both regional elites, as well as the sectarian population at large, which could only be held in check by a centralized rule through coercion, which itself was enabled through a reliance on sectarianism. Centralized coercion resulted in the death and displacement of millions of individuals. The mistrust and ethnic tensions that go hand in hand with keeping Iraq together, has convinced some scholars that the only solution is to break-up the country, and that this result is inevitable, but above all desirable, to stop all these tensions and accompanying violence and instability (Downes 2006).

Dabbous' critiques how the idea of partitioning Iraq only came about after the 2003 invasion by the US, and that it ignores the will of Iraqis, is thus in effect wrong. It could be argued that keeping the country *together* ignores the will of Iraqis, unless one is not to count the Kurds as Iraqis, which would aid their call for their own state in a different manner. However, the proof Dabbous provides hints at relevant considerations. Dabbous notes that Google Trends shows a marked increase for the search term "dividing Iraq" in Arabic, starting in 2004 and peaking in 2015. Indeed the *who* that considers partition is very relevant. Scholars have been writing actively on Iraq's partition since the First Gulf War, or flat out advocating it. Middle East and security issue expert professor Daniel Byman elaborately called for the partition of Iraq in 1996, favouring it as a geostrategic move for the US, as well as the solution to the

Iraqi threat to the wider Gulf region, while freeing the Kurds and Shiites of Sunni onslaught (Byman 1996). Numerous scholars since have made similar cases, and though prominent as they may be, they do not always inform, or influence policy-making.

US FP in Iraq has been extensively documented, and commented on. A concise work on what the US has done in Iraq, and the evolution of its policies, is presented by Robert K. Brigham, a professor on the history of US FP, in his work *The United States and Iraq Since 1990*. It sketches the choices, and effects, of American FP in Iraq chronologically, and might perhaps best serve as an argument for Iraq's partition, too. In its epilogue, the gloomy words of an Iraqi journalist, referring to the armed intra-state strife, echo as American troops pull out of Iraq in December 2011: "[The war] is the end for the Americans only" (Brigham 2014). However, illuminating as this work may be, it does not tackle the overarching question of how the idea of a unitary Iraq has become so persistent in American FP.

Chapter 2

A Brief History of a Unitary Iraq in American Strategic Thinking

This chapter will look at the history of US FP in Iraq, in order to illustrate when, how, or why Iraq's unity became an issue for the US. This chapter will answer the sub-question *What is the history of a Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy between 1920-1993?* To do so, it will structure the problem, political, and policy streams of US FP through three periods. First, from the time of the British mandate of Iraq in 1920 until the Ba'athist coup of 1968. The second from the Ba'athist coup until the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. The last period will cover the history of US FP until the end of the George H.W. Bush administration in 1993. The period after 1993 will be extensively covered by the third and fourth chapters. In this chapter, I will argue that removing Saddam became synonymous with the dissolution of Iraq, and explain why the US feared this consequence. By providing a short overview of the history of US FP in Iraq, it will also become clear that the problem stream of Iraq had long been released within the American political arena, though the shape of the problem was to change, and thus American policies would change as the problem converged with policies, and political will.

2.1 American Geostrategic Imperatives in Iraq between 1920-1968

For much of its early history, Iraq was a British mandate, founded through the mandate system of the League of Nations. The US did have economic stakes in the country, mainly through the Iraq Petroleum Company where American companies had gained a 23.75 percent ownership in 1928 (Wolfe-Hunnicutt 2018). The Cold War, however, resulted in an increasing interest from the American FP community in the wider Middle East. So too, US' political interests in Iraq grew.

In the forties and fifties, Iraq was ruled by a pro-Western monarchy. This monarchy was not popular amongst Iraqis, and had to be reinstated by the British in 1941 following a nationalist coup that held sentiments for Nazi-Germany (Holden 2012). American soldiers were posted in Iraq during the war years as well, and it is this posting that sowed an interesting seed in the minds of Americans. American soldiers sent to Iraq were given a 44-page booklet entitled *A Short Guide to Iraq.* The guide was meant to instruct soldiers on their behaviour (War and Navy Departments 1943). I found that the guide called Iraq "one of the

oldest countries in the world" (p.3). Iraq's artificiality, and recent inception, were swept under the rug for Americans who came into contact with the country.

Following World War II, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) became increasingly active in Iraq, which, although more moderate in ideology than the Soviet Union, was vehemently opposed to imperialism and the monarchy (Tripp 2007). The monarchy, seeing the communists as an existential threat, thus happily accepted foreign aid to counter the growing influence of the communists. The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, allowed the US to support Iraq, as the US sought to contain Soviet expansionism. This objective dominated the political stream, as the problem stream almost solely consisted of Soviet expansionism. The US funnelled funds to Iraq to counter communist influence (Hahn 2006). Iraq seemed secured from communist threat and, despite anti-Israeli sentiments, settled in the Western sphere of influence. However, this would prove to be short-lived.

In early 1958, the Free Officers Movement led by general Qasim committed a successful coup d'état (Romero 2011). This coup transformed Iraq into a republic, and immediately resulted in the deterioration of Iraq-US relations. The Free Officers Movement was politically diverse, but was united in strong anti-Western feelings and their aversion for the pro-Western foreign policies of the former regime (Tripp 2007). Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact, and officially recognized the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union. The Qasim years were confusing times for US policymakers. Although Qasim was flirting with socialist measures and the Soviet Union, he was at odds with the influential ICP. Facilitating regime change, then, might result in the very thing the Americans sought to prevent: a communist Iraq (Wolfe-Hunnicutt 2015). For this reason, regime change didn't find its way into the policy stream until much later. Relations between Iraq and the US further deteriorated over the status of Kuwait, and did not improve even after another coup resulting in a change in political direction in February 1963. The Ba'athists who came to power were anti-communist, but at the same time wanted to remain free of Western influence (Brigham 2014). In November 1963, another successful coup was committed, removing the Ba'athists from power again, and installing a pro-Nasserist government. The next five years, Iraq was the scene of intermittent conflict between the Kurds and the Iraqi central government. The Kurds were supported by the US allies in the region – Israel and Iran. Given the Iraqi regime's stance of 'positive neutrality', favouring good relations with both the Western and the Soviet bloc without definitively hedging their bets, the US adopted a wait-and-see attitude on the Kurdish issue, and Iraq more generally (Gibson 2013). This passivity

within the political stream, led to better relations between the two countries, where the US encouraged a peaceful settlement on the Kurdish issue, as opposed to its allies, in trying to keep Iraq stable. These relations would eventually break down again in 1967 following the Six-Day War. Until July 17th, 1968 when another coup was committed bringing a reorganized Ba'ath Party back to power.

2.2 American Geostrategic Imperatives in Iraq between 1968-1988

The Iraqi Ba'ath was projected not to radicalize in its foreign policies, while it remained to be seen how the new rulers would handle the Kurdish issue (Holden 2012). The US stance on the Kurdish issue was precarious. On the one hand it desired a stable Iraq, while on the other hand it did not want the Kurds to become an appendage of the Soviets (Gibson 2013). As Iraq flirted with the Soviet Union, the Soviet's policies towards the Kurds changed from supportive to condemning. The US did exactly the opposite, which led the Kurds to believe they had American backing. However, this support never went beyond lip service (Holden 2012). Iraqi-Soviet relations never developed beyond their initial flirting either, which made Iraq "a secondary concern" for US policymakers (Brigham 2014).

When the Islamic Revolution in Iran took place in 1979, the geostrategic calculus of the Americans changed dramatically. Overnight it had lost perhaps its most important ally in the region. The Shi'a majority of Iraq, who had been the subject of repression by the Ba'ath Party, took "solace" in the Iranian revolution (Brigham 2014). The view that the revolution would take root in Iraq as well, destabilizing the country, was not far-fetched. Not only in light of similar religious beliefs, and Shi'a history under the Ba'ath Party: it was a pronounced goal by Ayatollah Khomeini that the Islamic Revolution should be exported. The efforts and rhetoric towards this end was cause for concern within the US intelligence community. Iran saw Iraq as its primary target, considering its geographic proximity to Iran, and the oppressed Shi'a majority within Iraq (National Foreign Assessment Center 1980). The Reagan administration was concerned that the continuing efforts of the nascent Iranian regime could result in political collapse in Iraq (Freedman and Karsh 1993). Inside Iraq, things did not remain quiet. Saddam Hussein ousted incumbent al-Bakr, declared himself president, and swiftly dealt with Shi'a protests, and the Kurdish independence movement (Brigham 2014, Holden 2012). Concomitantly, hostilities between Iran and Iraq escalated, which in September of 1980 turned to armed conflict. A war that would last eight years had begun between the two countries. The war was initiated by Saddam Hussein for a host of

reasons. One of the reasons was to prevent the export of the Islamic Revolution to his own country, and kill it by the root as the new regime and system in place in neighbouring Iran seemed feeble. Ironically, the war helped consolidate the Iranian regime, as it galvanized the Iranians through a rally-the-flag effect (Tripp 2007). The goal of preventing the expansion of Iranian influence in the region was something the US, and its Western, and Arab allies, could only endorse. The thought of an Iranian take-over of Iraq had them "White with fear" (Miller and Mylorie 1990, 193).

The war initially saw gains for Iraq, but two years later the Iranians were on the offensive, and gaining ground. This prompted the US to step up aid to Iraq, as it sought to prevent the exportation of the Islamic Revolution, as well as preserve the political order in Iraq (Brigham 2014). The problem, and policy streams thus altered in this period, to include the fear of Iranian expansion, and aims to prevent this. In 1984, the US formally normalized its relations with Iraq by restoring ambassadorial relations. When the dust of the Iran-Iraq war was settled, Saddam turned out to be a monster who not only used chemical weapons in his war against the Iranians, but also on his own population. Despite this, the White House, through White House National Security Directive 26 circulated on October 2nd 1989 and declassified on May 26th 1999, called normal relations with Iraq as serving American long-term interests. In the same memorandum, the cabinet is informed that Iraq will be met with economic and political sanctions, if it continues to use biological and chemical weapons, or does not comply with the International Atomic and Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards (G. H. Bush 1989). This would become a recurring issue, but not the one that instigated US-Iraq relations to take a new, sharp turn.

2.3 American Geostrategic Imperatives in Iraq between 1988-1993

After the Iran-Iraq war, despite continuing human rights abuses, the US initially kept supporting Iraq. However, relations turned sour as Saddam's aggressive rhetoric increased. Saddam boasted about his chemical weapons, and openly threatened Israel, of whom the US was, and is a staunch ally (Brigham 2014). The Iran-Iraq war had left Iraq financially devastated. Well aware of how Iraqi officers treated leaders they were dissatisfied with, Saddam knew he had to act if he was to survive (Rautsi and Karsh 1991, F. Gause 2002). Indeed, he had felt the breath of assassinations, and impending coups before (Brigham 2014, Tripp 2007, F. Gause 2002). Rhetoric, official reasoning, Iraqi calculations, and ultimate goals aside, Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990. Kuwait was quickly incorporated into

the Iraqi body politic. This was unacceptable to the American political elite. With Kuwait incorporated into Iraq, Saddam controlled 20% of the world's oil supply, and had the potential to either annex Saudi Arabia, or bully them into falling in line with Iraqi oil policies, potentially controlling either directly or by proxy 45% of the world's oil supply (F. Gause 2010, Miller and Mylorie 1990). If Saddam was allowed to retain control over Kuwait, he would have the power to grind the global economy to a halt (Miller and Mylorie 1990).

The US responded with immediate economic sanctions. The United Nations (U.N.) passed resolutions crippling Iraq's trade, condemning Iraq, and made public a refusal to recognize Iraq's claims to Kuwait (Brigham 2014). Concomitantly, the US launched Operation Desert Shield to prevent Saddam from making further land grabs. In a televised address, George H.W. Bush assured that no incursion would be made into Kuwait, or Iraq, but that instead he was confident Iraq would comply with international norms under pressure of the economic sanctions (G. H. Bush 1990). In the same speech, the sitting president reaffirmed US' commitment to stability in the Gulf region as it historically had been, since the presidency of Roosevelt (1933-1945). The Bush administration feverishly exhausted all options before resorting to military conflict, resulting in mocking of Bush's national security team by the American FP community, where Bush would tell his national security team: "Don't do anything, just sit there!" (Brigham 2014, 18). But there was a rational calculus behind not jumping the gun. By building a coalition of Arab states, and working through the processes of international institutions, the Bush administration made sure that any military action would not antagonize anyone, further destabilizing the region. Simultaneously, it choked the options for Saddam in hopes of garnering support of his own. Once Operation Desert Storm commenced, to liberate Kuwait, and cripple the Iraqi offensive capabilities, Saddam's forces were quickly routed.

The decision was made not to run the Iraqi forces down, and march to Baghdad to topple Saddam. Many in the Bush administration saw the toppling of Saddam wrought with insurmountable hurdles. For one, it would be unclear who would rule Iraq (Herring 2008). Then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, asserted that the US would be ruling Iraq at "unpardonable expense in terms of money, lives lost, and ruined regional relationships" (Powell 1993, 37). National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft saw the aim of removing Saddam as a choice between the indefinite occupation of Iraq by US forces, and leaving a power vacuum in the Gulf region for Iran to fill (Scowcroft 1996). Occupying Iraq would cause the immediate collapse of the coalition in the mind of the Bush administration,

and incur "incalculable human and political cost" (Bush and Scowcroft 1998, 489). The George H.W. Bush administration also feared the break-up of the Iraqi state as a consequence of removing the strong centre in Baghdad, which would antagonize, and destabilize the wider region (Bush and Scowcroft 1998). If Saddam would be toppled it had to be done by Iraqis, so that an alternative was immediately in place, and it would be seen as a "beneficial by-product" (Scowcroft 1996, 37). However, the uprisings encouraged by the US never received formal support owing to a fear of an Iranian take-over of the uprisings (Baker 1995). For US policy-makers, toppling Saddam became synonymous with a potential break-up of the Iraqi state, and increased Iranian influence. For these reasons, the policy option of removing Saddam never converged with the political stream.

Stopping short of toppling Saddam, the Bush administration's policy towards Iraq led to many criticisms. Allowing the Republican Guard to escape facilitated Saddam's retention of power (Freedman 2008). Without a formal surrender from Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator was able to spin the propaganda that he had in fact defeated the United States (Freedman 2008). The Republican Guard quickly regrouped, and dealt with the uprisings that had been encouraged by the US. The resulting human tragedy was a public relations disaster for the Bush administration (Brigham 2014). Although the administration established no-fly zones in Iraq to prevent further abuses, the opposition within American politics had their ammunition for the presidential elections. Of the voters who stated that FP mattered most in determining their vote, only 7 percent voted for George H.W. Bush running for re-election (Drumbell 2019). Clinton won the election, inheriting unfavourable policy in regards to Iraq, which was ruled by a dictator who remained a nuisance in the view of American policy-makers, and would come to feature prominently in the problem stream within American politics.

2.4 Conclusion: Fear of Commitment

For American policy-makers, Iraq was initially part of the wider containment strategy towards the Soviets. As power changed hands several times within Iraq, the problem for American policy-makers remained the containment of Soviet influence while fostering stability in Iraq. Iraq's positive neutrality between 1963 and 1967 allowed the US to retain a passive stance. After the 1968 coup, and Iraq's flirtations with the Soviets, the US saw itself obligated to shore up Kurdish aspirations. Because Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union never really took off it, the US could retain a passive stance, not moving beyond lip-service

in aiding the Kurds. A seemingly stable Iraq became a second-rate concern for US policy-makers, and its unity went unquestioned.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran refocused American interests in the region, and Iraq in particular due to its proximity to Iran, and Iraq's susceptive Shi'a majority. When Iraq launched a war against Iran that it threatened to lose, the US stepped up its efforts in aiding Iraq to prevent an Iranian take-over of the region, and prevent collapse of the Iraqi state. Soviet containment had been supplanted by a containment policy for Iran, while stability remained paramount. After the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq proved to be a source of instability of itself for the wider region, and the US was forced to react militarily. The goal was to destroy any Iraqi offensive capabilities, securing future stability for the region. Saddam was allowed to remain for fear of internal instability, and consequent Iranian dominance in the region. For the US, a stable Iraq was an important regional counterweight to Iranian expansionism: strong enough to resist Iran, but weak enough so that it could not threaten the region. The US would not have been able to achieve a stable Iraq if it were to occupy the country indefinitely. The alternative to US occupation of Iraq, toppling Saddam or aiding Iraqis in that pursuit, was calculated to result in either an Iranian take-over, or the break-up of Iraq. Both these outcomes were seen as problems in themselves as the US sought to both contain Iran, and foster stability in the Gulf region. After the first Gulf war, Saddam was thus allowed to remain, and Iraq continued its human rights abuses. This added fuel to the already burning fire that it was a mistake not to pursue the deposition of Saddam. For American policy-makers, however, Saddam's deposition became synonymous to increased Iranian influence, and the probable break-up of Iraq.

The problem stream of Iraq for the United States ranged from Soviet expansionism to imminent Iranian preponderance, and from Iraqi regional dominance to human rights abuses within Iraq. The problem of Iraq has been present in American FP in one way or another from the Second World War onwards. Geopolitical realities influenced Iraq's prominence in American strategic thinking. American FP towards Iraq remained passive to a large degree, until the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in 1979. This revolution added the strategic objective for the US of containing Iran, and preventing expansion of Iranian influence in the region. It forced the US to take sides in the Iran-Iraq war, as Iraq threatened to lose the conflict it initiated. After the war, Iraq embarked on its own expansionary expedition. This not only threatened the stability of the region, but would hand Saddam a veto over the global economy via the control of oil, if left unchecked. The US transformed its policies from Soviet

containment, to containment of Iran, to dual-containment: both Iran and Iraq had to be kept in check, in order to safe-guard the stability of the region, and protect the global economy. The American political stream had been geared towards the status quo. It feared commitment to change, because change might facilitate the very things they were trying to prevent: Soviet expansionism, Iranian preponderance, and an instable Iraq and wider Gulf region. Iraqi unity was tantamount to containing Iran, and maintaining regional stability, complicating strategic thinking as the US sought to contain Iraq as well.

Chapter 3

The Rise of Policy Entrepreneurs During the Clinton Era

This chapter will examine the problem, policy, and political streams during the 1993-2001 Clinton era, and answer the sub-question *How did the problem, policy, and political streams develop over time during the Clinton administrations?* This chapter will show that the policies inherited by the Clinton administrations vis-à-vis Iraq were viewed unfavourably by the wider American political elite, as the Iraqi problem endured in the minds of this elite. These policies would be increasingly criticized, both by domestic and international FP actors. This not only resulted in a change of policy, but also a growing political will within the US, to drastically change course in calling for the removal of Saddam from power. I will argue for, and illustrate this growing political will, by analyzing primary sources in the form of output of a prominent think-tank, and an open letter that was sent to President Clinton in February 1998. I will argue that the Clinton era gave rise to policy entrepreneurs seeking the removal of Saddam from power, in a world that was perceived to be unipolar, with the United States as the sole remaining superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, setting the stage for the Second Gulf War.

3.1 A Taste of Your Own Medicine, Mr. President

During the election campaigns of George H.W. Bush, and William Clinton, FP issues were not the main concern for the public. Only eight percent of voters stated that FP determined their vote (Drumbell 2019). This is perhaps not very surprising as the US had just devastated Iraq in a war, a country which had the fourth largest military in the world at the time. The swift military victory over Iraq broadcasted American supremacy. Ten months after the end of the First Gulf War, the Soviet Union collapsed. The Soviet Union had often been referred to as the evil empire since Reagan coined the term in 1983, and fears of its expanding influence had largely dictated American FP since the start of the Cold War. Overnight, the biggest FP concern for the US had evaporated. In short: things were going well for America, and it was not threatened by anyone. This sentiment is not to be underestimated. There was a sense of victory, and relief in America, where its system and values were proven to be superior. It would just be a matter of time before the world would conform to America's standards. Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in 1992, epitomizes this conviction.

The logic may have seem sound at the time. In a unipolar world, states could not strategically manoeuvre between superpowers, baiting support from one, forcing those states to open to the wider world in more ways than one. Freedman writes of the optimist thinking in concrete visions: states would need to attract investment and trade, opening previously closed gates, allowing the movement of people and ideas; authoritarian regimes would lose control of information flows due to the advent of mobile phones and the internet, which in turn would "create irresistible demands for freedom and human rights, expanding the community of democracies" (Freedman 2008, 278-279). Democratic peace theory – the theory that democracies do not go to war with one another – was gaining popularity with the scholarly, and political public. So, too, with presidential candidate Clinton, who centred his FP on the promotion of democracy, and human rights (Freedman 2008, Drumbell 2019). Indeed, Clinton and his team saw it as their responsibility to actively promote such values in light of the end of the Cold War, along with the scores of now politically independent states (Lake April 1994). As more states would become democratic, violent conflict would decrease, and, in turn, global trade would benefit; and so would America.

This worked well in Clinton's campaigning strategy, when attacking the FP choices of the George H.W. Bush administration. In the view of Clinton, the Bush administration had idly stood by at a number of gross human rights violations, not least of which was the aftermath of the First Gulf War. Clinton criticized Bush for his "ambivalence about supporting democracy", and accused him of "befriend[ing] potentates and dictators" (Brigham 2014, 41). It was these types of remarks that led Clinton to be perceived as the presidential candidate that would enact proactive foreign policies once elected, garnering support from those who wished to see America take an active, leading role on the world stage.

Once in office, however, Clinton and his team realized that an interventionist FP came at a price they were not willing to pay. The Clinton administration saw the same woes as the Bush administration before it in regards to Iraq (Brigham 2014, Freedman 2008). Moreover, Clinton's first National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake (1993-1997), argued that the strategic importance of Iraq had decreased dramatically owing to a number of factors: due to the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no antagonistic superpower seeking to gain a foothold in Iraq; Iraq's devastation during Operation Desert Storm crippled its offensive capabilities; Iraq had lost most, if not all political capital in the region after its invasion of Kuwait; conversely, the US enjoyed strong relations with "critical powers" in the region,

while the Arab-Israeli peace process was making progress (Lake April 1994, 48-49). Fears of what would happen if the US actively pursued regime-change in Iraq, coupled with the new geopolitical realities in absence of the Soviet Union, and the decreased strategic importance of Iraq, altered the problem stream in the minds of the Clinton administration. The Clinton administration was content with continuing the sanctions regime, established under the Bush administration that came before it. The political, and policy streams, however, still favoured an alternative to Saddam, although it was not clear what that alternative should be. Parallel to the sanctions regime, and in lieu of American-forced regime change, the US continued to support Iraqi opposition. An umbrella organization known as the Iraqi National Congress (INC) received training, funds, and weapons from the US. It's impact, however, was virtually non-existent. The Iraqi population viewed the organization as "weak, fractious, unrepresentative and corrupt"; Kurdish elements were seen as threatening Iraq's territorial integrity, and Shi'a elements were seen as Iranian proxies (Pollack, Waxman and Byman Autumn 1998, 136). Rather than uniting opposition, and threatening Saddam, the INC had an inverted effect: it rallied the Iraqi elite around Saddam (Pollack, Waxman and Byman Autumn 1998).

The Clinton administration, and its policies towards Iraq, drew increasing criticisms from both domestic and international actors in four important ways. The first critique was about the effectiveness of the sanctions regime and the no-fly zones. Despite the sanctions regime, Iraq was perceived by the US to continue its pursuit of the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saddam failed to cooperate with both the U.N. and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and his behaviour led American policy-makers to suspect he was still pursuing the development of WMD (Brigham 2014). History would later teach us that Saddam feigned this pursuit for his own domestic, and regional standing (see e.g. Tripp, 2007 or Gause, 2010). The no-fly zones seemed to do very little in abating the human rights abuses, or the military campaigns of Saddam against his own population (Brigham 2014). Second, the sanctions regime, perpetuated by the US through the U.N., was increasingly viewed as inhumane by the international community. Saddam was able to spin these sanctions as targeting the civilian population of Iraq. Scenes of starvation in Iraq drew worldwide attention, resulting in calls from the international community, and the public at large, for the lifting of the sanctions (F. Gause 2010, Freedman 2008). The third critique had its roots in the US' implicit goal behind the sanctions regime. Through international institutions, the US sought to get Saddam in line with its norms, and prevent Iraqi acquisition

of WMD. However, the US continued to encourage regime-change from within Iraq, and these sanctions were an important piece of the puzzle in keeping up the pressure on Saddam; the sanctions crippled Saddam's patronage network, damaging his domestic standing (F. Gause 2010). This implicit goal was cause for concern among regional allies of the US, who feared the disintegration of Iraq as a consequence. In the minds of US' regional allies, Iraq's disintegration would lead to a radical reshuffle of the regional balance of power in favour of Saudi Arabia and Iran, which led these allies to call for easing of the sanctions, and the reintegration of Iraq into regional politics in order to prevent this scenario (F. Gause April 1994). Finally, the Clinton administration drew increasing criticisms from within the American FP community, not just on the case of Iraq, but across the board. Some had become disillusioned by the lack of FP strength that they had hoped the Clinton administration would project once in office. They didn't see traditional threats as America's primary FP concern, but the lack of future American strength (Kristol and Kagan July 1996). This strength could only be preserved by pursuing "benevolent global hegemony" through active FP of "military supremacy and moral confidence", even projecting eventual American-assisted regime-change in Beijing (Kristol and Kagan July 1996, 20-28). This circle within the FP community, which would come to be known as the neo-conservatives, would radically change American FP. During his administrations, William Clinton would be increasingly criticized by American political circles for doing the very thing he himself had criticized his predecessor for: ineffective policy towards Iraq that allowed continued human rights abuses, without removing the threat Saddam posed to the region, and the US.

3.2 Project for the New American Century

Project for the New American Century (PNAC) was an American think-tank established in 1997, and dissolved in 2006. The think-tank warrants special mention for two reasons: (1) the PNAC embodied the change in political thinking that drew increasing support to the neo-conservative camp, and (2) ten of the PNAC's twenty-five founding members would come to serve in the Bush administration that succeeded the Clinton administrations. Notable names include Richard Cheney (CEO of Haliburton between 1995 – 2000), Paul Wolfowitz (dean of the SAIS at John Hopkins University at the time), Donald Rumsfeld (then chairman of Gilead Sciences, a multi-billion dollar biotechnology company), and Zalmay Khalilzad (at the time director of the Strategy, Doctrine, and Force Structure at the RAND Corporation).

The people who produced output for the think-tank were thus well-connected, and can be identified as policy entrepreneurs for the Iraq policies enacted under the George W. Bush administration. The goal of the PNAC was to "promote American global leadership", which the think-tank saw as "good for both America and for the world", and that "such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle" (Project for the New American Century 2019). Its statement of principles directly derived from the 1996 article by Kristol and Kagan cited in the previous paragraph: "Toward a Neo-Reaganite FP", published in *Foreign Affairs*.

The PNAC regularly challenged Clinton's policies towards Iraq through statements before the House National Security Committee, publishing op-eds in newspapers and magazines, and sending letters to the president. Between 1997 and 2000, the PNAC published twenty-four pieces in relation to Iraq. Analyzing these publications, I found that the critiques of the PNAC about Clinton's handling of Iraq centred around the menace Saddam continued to be, and lack of American resolve. For the PNAC, Saddam was "the heart of the problem" (Wolfowitz 1998, House National Security Committee on Iraq testimony). "Containment of Saddam is an illusion", because Saddam would not change his behaviour, and the US would never be able to keep up its containment policies indefinitely (Kristol and Kagan 1998, 15). According to the PNAC, America could not rely on its allies or the international community, as evidenced by the lack of support in containing Saddam (Abrams, et al. 1998). The US should thus unilaterally "[implement] a strategy for removing Saddam's regime from power" (Abrams, et al. 1998, 21). The PNAC deemed the containment policy not just as failing, but even aiding Saddam.

Saddam was increasingly able to spin the sanctions as targeting Iraq's population, at a time when human rights were high on the global agenda. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, human rights violations were regarded as one of the bigger issues facing the world at the time (Brzezinski 2008). The humanitarian outrage caused a host of actors to criticize the sanctions regime, most notably France and Russia, though these states may have had ulterior, economic motives (F. Gause 2010). In an effort to relieve the humanitarian suffering, the U.N. 'Oil for Food' program was adopted, which allowed for the limited sale of Iraqi oil on international markets in exchange for humanitarian goods. Saddam, however, was able to use these proceeds and goods to strengthen his patronage network, and solidify his own position within Iraq, because he largely controlled the flow of goods and proceeds once these entered Iraq (F. Gause 2010). Moreover, the program allowed Iraq to extract bribes and concessions,

owing to two factors of the program. The Oil for Food program allowed Iraq to pick the buyers of its oil, and it allowed Iraq to set its own price. By deliberately under pricing its oil, Iraq was able to extract political favours and bribes from buyers (Hsieh and Moretti November 2006). The PNAC saw the program as a loophole in the sanctions, for which the US itself was responsible by endorsing it (Bolton 1997). The program was unnecessary because humanitarian goods were never blocked through the initial sanctions resolutions. Indeed, Saddam himself was responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people, not the sanctions regime (Bolton 1997).

The PNAC members deemed the concessions made by the Clinton administrations towards Iraq as failing in resolve. America was failing to take the global lead in a unipolar world, allowing international pressures to dictate policies against its own interests. In the case of Iraq, these interests continued to be defined as preventing Iraq from developing WMD, and removing Saddam from power. Saddam's continuous dodging of weapons inspections, convinced the American FP community that Saddam was successfully pursuing the development of WMD, despite truth of the contrary. The easing of sanctions through the Oil for Food program gave Saddam leeway, instead of constricting him to encourage a regime change. For the PNAC members, the Clinton policies towards Iraq were thus not just ineffective, but were actively working against America's own interests. America was failing to claim 'global benevolent hegemony', which, in turn, was undermining future American strength, and therefore security.

3.3 An Open Letter to the President & the Iraq Liberation Act

Critique of Clinton's handling of Iraq came to a head in the early months of 1998. In October the previous year, Saddam had blocked U.N. inspectors. What followed was a three months during tango between the US, the U.N., and Iraq: deals were brokered by the U.N., and Russia, but broke down again; the US threatened military action, but the international community called for restraint; and, as soon as military confrontation seemed inevitable, Iraq showed piecemeal acquiescence. In January 1998, Saddam agreed to continued U.N.-led inspections with the exemption of select sites. At the same time, he demanded that the inspections would finally stop in May of the same year, and that sanctions would be lifted. There had been no conclusive evidence that he was still pursuing WMD, and PNAC members judged that Saddam knew the sanctions coalition was faltering (Kagan 1998, Kristol and Kagan 1998). Saddam saw an opportunity in letting the sanctions and inspections regime

collapse, knowing what his defiance might lead to – limited airstrikes – and knowing what it would definitely not lead to: American forced regime change (Kagan 1998).

The intermittent punitive airstrikes the Iraqi regime had endured had done nothing to change Iraq's behaviour, nor had it facilitated regime change. Indeed, there was no reason for any one side in this debacle to think that it would be different this time. The international community saw such strikes as futile, and Saddam was thriving despite these strikes. The growing circle of neoconservatives saw these strikes as futile for the same reason. They preferred a harder stick, instead of a carrot by lifting the sanctions regime. PNAC members had always favoured the deposition of Saddam, and pointed out the futility of continuing current policy (see e.g. (Bolton 1998) (Abrams, et al. 1998) (Kagan and Kristol 1997)). The call for regime change in Iraq moved beyond the confines of the PNAC: the neoconservative bandwagon drew wider support.

A group known as the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf organized itself. Although there was some overlap with the PNAC in its membership, it was the total make-up of this group that gave it such credence in American politics. The group consisted of 39 prominent FP individuals, the bulk of whom had held high office, e.g. in the senate, or presidential cabinets. They saw the policies of containment as shortcoming in wider American strategic objectives. Not only was Iraqi acquisition of WMD problematic, but Saddam's willingness to use them made the Iraqi problem pertinent. The removal of the Saddam regime from power, and installing a democratic government and system in Iraq was the solution to these problems. The committee signalled similar problems as the PNAC, among which was the faltering of the coalition against Iraq upholding the sanctions, in particular by the regional American allies. These allies sought to appease Saddam, and bring Iraq back into regional politics, because of an unwillingness by the Americans to push for Saddam's removal. The indefinite retention of power by Saddam pushed regional states to opt for bridge-building, instead of antagonizing Saddam. This logic led the committee to believe that regional allies would support the US, once it committed to a strategy that would oust Saddam, as opposed to punitive strikes that didn't change anything (Solarz, et al. 1998). The committee, through an open letter to the president, called for a "political and military strategy for bringing down Saddam", seeing Iraq as "ripe for a broad-based insurrection", and stated that any strategy short of bringing down Saddam in dealing with Iraq "will not constrain him" (Solarz, et al. 1998).

The letter epitomized the growing feeling in Washington that there was only one solution to the problem of Iraq: remove Saddam from power. Interestingly, the letter calls for broader support of the INC, which for Iraqis held little credence. Fears of Iraq's disintegration after the toppling of Saddam are omitted – whether these fears simply did not exist among the members of the committee, or whether these fears were deliberately omitted is not clear. Despite increasing calls for regime change in Iraq, the Clinton administration did not alter its policies substantively. However, there was a change in political view on how the problem of Iraq should be handled, which resulted in the signing into law of the Iraq Liberation Act by Clinton on October 31st, 1998.

The Iraq Liberation Act called for several things, though most notably "[for] policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime", and appropriating roughly $100 million to support Iraqi "democratic opposition organizations" (105th United States Congeress 1998). The 104th United States Congress, serving from January 1995 – January 1997, was the first in decades to have a Republican majority in both the senate and the house. This majority would remain until January 3rd, 2001 – roughly the remainder of Clinton's tenure. Although the neoconservatives mainly drew their support from the Republican Party, it is interesting to note that despite Republican majority, the Iraq Liberation Act did not require this majority for its support. The act was passed by unanimous consent in the Senate, and was passed with 360 yeas and 38 nays in the House of Representatives. Regime change in Iraq was thus favoured across the board in American politics; the political, and policy streams geared towards the removal of Saddam.

Regime change never materialized under Clinton. Instead, the administration continued to try and build international support for its containment policies by sanctions and inspection regimes. After the collapse of the UNSCOM in December 1998, Clinton again reverted to punitive military strikes. These were condemned by China, Russia and France, showing massive disagreement within the UNSC on the course of action in regards to Iraq. Saddam's strategy in dividing the coalition seemed to be working, and his projected "impending victory" as explicated by PNAC co-founder Robert Kagan was coming to fruition. The inspection regime was replaced by UNMOVIC in December 1999 after negotiation efforts by the US (Gordon and Shapiro 2004). The damage within the international community in splitting the coalition against Saddam, however, was done. Many believed that the US would never accept Saddam's regime, regardless of circumstance

(Gordon and Shapiro 2004). The Iraq Liberation Act made it hard to believe otherwise. Conversely, the Americans saw the international community as undermining its strategy for their own economic gains, or because they simply felt Saddam was not a threat (Gordon and Shapiro 2004, F. Gause 2010). By the end of Clinton's tenure, not much had changed: Saddam was still in power, and continued his defiance. The Iraq Liberation Act, however, would later be cited by George W. Bush as legal grounds for the Second Gulf War. The growing circle of neoconservatives were planting seeds everywhere within the American political establishment, influencing the political, policy, and problem streams, foreshadowing Saddam's deposition.

3.4 Conclusion: The Rise of Policy Entrepreneurs

The rhetoric Clinton used during his election campaign was cause for what would become the neo-conservatives, to be hopeful for a more assertive US FP. However, the Clinton administration was disillusioned by realizing the costs of an interventionist FP. So, too, the neo-conservatives were disillusioned. The neo-conservatives organized themselves through think-tanks, and committees, criticizing the containment policies, and the lack of American global leadership. The Clinton administration continued to try and build international support for the sanctions, and inspections regimes. The faltering of the coalition behind these regimes, and Saddam's continued defiance, coalesced into a growing political will for a change in strategy. The critiques initially vocalized through the PNAC, found their way into the political stream. Congress almost unanimously supported efforts to pursue regime change in Iraq.

Although the political will to depose Saddam was growing, this was not actively pursued by the Clinton administration, despite the Iraq Liberation Act. There was a mismatch between the political will of the cabinet, and the political will of the wider American political elite. The political elite at large was ready to accept the policies advocated by the policy entrepreneurs of the PNAC, and the signatories of the open letter, while the administration stuck to its containment policies. Even though the administration recognized the problem Saddam continued to be, alternative strategies seemed worse. It feared a disintegration of Iraq, as did regional states. The administrations preferred consensus-building in the international community. For the neo-conservatives, this consensus meant compromise, which in turn meant that Saddam was allowed to continue to defy the inspections regime.

The neo-conservatives viewed Saddam's defiance of the inspections regime as proof he was pursuing WMD. In theory, the longer Saddam was allowed to remain in power, the closer he would get to acquiring WMD. For these policy entrepreneurs, there was thus a sense of urgency in removing him from power. The fear of a disintegrated Iraq either did not exist to them, or was purposefully omitted in their arguments in calling for the removal of Saddam. The sense of urgency was increasingly felt across the American political spectrum. The problem stream converged with the policy, and political streams on all levels, except that of the presidency within American politics. Policies to remove Saddam from power were advocated across the board. All it would take, was a president willing to enact them. By the end of the Clinton presidency, it did not seem to be a matter of *if* Saddam would be removed from power, but more a question of *when*.

Chapter 4

Empowered Policy Entrepreneurs
The Enactment of Dormant Policies During the George W. Bush Administrations

This chapter will examine the consolidation of policy within the policy stream, and answer the sub question: *What did the policy stream look like during the George W. Bush administrations?* In order to do so, I will examine, and critically engage two prominent primary sources. The first is the Future of Iraq Project. This is a 1200 page document, compiled by some 200 Iraqi and international experts on a range of topics, who researched what policies should be pursued by Iraq in tandem with the US, once Saddam was deposed. The second is an 84 page bipartisan report by the Iraq Study Group, commissioned by US congress in 2006. The report identifies problems in Iraq, and US policy towards it, and was meant to advise the US government on what policies to pursue in light of growing hostilities in Iraq. Examining these two documents will clarify how the George W. Bush administrations looked at the problems in Iraq, and what policy options they deemed feasible. I will argue that the decision to depose Saddam suffered from institutional memory loss, and that wishful thinking informed the policy recommendations by the Iraq Study Group. I will argue that Iraq's unity is contingent on both regional dynamics, and internal cohesion. I will argue that America's commitment to Iraq's unity is also contingent on regional dynamics, and that the success of Iraq's internal cohesion builds on wishful thinking as well. Finally, I will argue that Iran's influence is vastly overstated, and should play a smaller role in American geostrategic calculus.

4.1 The New American Century

When George W. Bush came into office, he delegated FP making to others in his cabinet (Brzezinski 2008). The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, however, "[shocked] the United States into a state of fear and the pursuit of unilateral policies" (Brzezinski 2008, 13). This forced Bush to actively engage with FP, and removed the incentive for consensus building with the international community. As Bush himself put it: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (G. W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People 2001).

The events of that day put America on an assertive course in global politics, where the support of other states for US' actions was secondary to America's own policy objectives. The neo-conservatives had been advocating for precisely such a course for roughly a decade. Moreover, as Freedman put it: "it changed the terms of the security debate" (Freedman 2008, 402). Containing Iraq seemed like a strategy that would inevitably lead to Iraqi acquisition of WMD, especially in light of the unravelling of the sanctions regime. Saddam's willingness to use such weapons, and his aversion for the US and Israel, amounted to an unacceptable risk to US policy-makers. Threats had to be dealt with, before they could manifest (Freedman 2008).

When reviewing the previous chapter, the deposition of Saddam seemed inevitable. Especially considering that individuals who were staunch supporters of regime-change in Iraq, occupied key positions within the Bush administration. Supporting regime-change in Iraq, and enforcing regime-change through military power, however, are two different things. The neo-conservatives needed a focussing event that allowed them to step up their efforts in pursuing regime-change in Iraq. September 11th brought them such an event. That same day, Saddam was linked to supporting terrorism, and Iraq found itself branded as a country of the 'Axis of Evil', alongside Iran and North Korea (Brigham 2014). The neo-conservatives now had their president who was willing to act assertively on the global stage, pursuing American interests unilaterally, and with military power if necessary. The focussing event brought the problem, policy, and political streams together, and the US government set things in motion to prepare for American-forced regime change in Iraq. One of these things was a project set up by the US State Department, designed to research what Iraq should look like, once the US had deposed Saddam, and how the US should compose itself in a post-Saddam Iraq. This project was aptly named: The Future of Iraq Project.

4.2 The Future of Iraq Project

The Future of Iraq Project aimed primarily to identify what should be done in the aftermath of regime change in Iraq. The project was meant to aid in US government practical planning for the future of Iraq, and identify, and engage with people and ideas that could play a role in post-Saddam Iraq. The project was broad in scope, and inclusive in its membership. The inclusiveness of membership of the project is reflected in notes on disagreement between Kurdish and Arabic members, as well as iterations of the need to respect diversity, and to

promote inclusiveness in Iraqi society. The members of the project were divided into twelve groups, each group researching policy for their own field of expertise.

The members of the project made it clear from the outset that Iraq's territorial integrity should be maintained. Although no explanations are provided in the overview, it is noted that "All agreed that Iraq's territorial integrity was paramount and any changes made should be executed with that principle in mind" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 44). The report of the Democratic Principles and Procedures group does provide an explanation, if only a partial one. It states that "the regional situation does not allow [the Kurds] to secede and have [their] own separate state in northern Iraq" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 92). The territorial integrity of Iraq in the minds of the authors, then, was contingent on regional dynamics, and regional political realities. The emphasis on the paramountcy of Iraq's territorial integrity, hints at the fragility of Iraq. The partial explanation provided is an external reasoning; remove it, and Iraq disintegrates.

The reports of the respective groups of the project, stress measures in order to safeguard Iraq's territorial integrity. The 'Transitional Authority' – a government to be installed until a permanent constitution was accepted by the Iraqi population at large – should "reflect fairly the multiple social and political constituencies of Iraq. (...) If [it] fails to be inclusive (...) the [territorial] integrity of Iraq will be endangered" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 18). In order to achieve this inclusiveness, the Democratic Principles and Procedures group argued that the Transitional Authority should draw on the pool of four million exiles, and the three million people living in Northern Iraq. The report conceded that it would be impossible to "quantify the numerical support for any group or individual inside Iraq", but argued that owing to its size, and political and social diversity, the opposition group could "convincingly claim to be a true reflection of Iraqi pluralism" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 18). Whether this group could truly reflect Iraqi pluralism, is cause for debate. Northern Iraq was, and still is, predominantly Kurdish. The Iraqi exiles, were exiles for a reason: one way or another, they had crossed the Saddam regime. Even though they were united in their anti-Saddam sentiment, there is no evidence to suggest that the group indeed reflected the plurality of Iraqi society at large.

For the short term, Iraqis and the US may not have had an alternative option to relying on the exiles, and Iraqis in Northern Iraq. Political organization within Iraq was nearly impossible under Saddam. Northern Iraq was the only region on the territory of Iraq where

rudimentary political organization was possible, due to the *de facto* establishment of the Kurdish autonomous region there. Indeed, the INC had met there on several occasions, whereas most political meetings and conferences had been held abroad, outside of Saddam's reach. Although the INC was perhaps the most organized opposition group, project members called for its disarmament, and disbanding. According to the Defense Policy and Institutions group, Iraqi national security "is the ability to survive and continue as a national entity and to guarantee political independence and the unity of the national territory" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 52). Although the group called for the exclusion of the use of the army in internal disputes, it simultaneously defined the mission of the military as "protect[ing] the regime from the dangers of factionalism" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 58). The INC embodied such factionalism, owing to their Kurdish, and Shi'a elements. Allowing such groups to continue to exist as an armed faction would inherently threaten Iraq's territorial integrity. Therefore, the project called for the subsumption of such groups into the wider security apparatus (The Future of Iraq Project 2002).

Across the board, decentralization and federalism, recognizing diversity among Iraqis, and protection of minority rights, were seen as long-term solutions to the fragility of Iraq by the project's members. Federalism would be the only way to stop the Kurds from seceding. Moreover, federalism would ensure that "the rights of the part, or the minority [would] never be sacrificed to the will of the majority" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 92). The group on Transitional Justice called for recognition of diversity within the constitution, and for the recognition and protection of the rights of all the minorities (The Future of Iraq Project 2002). The equality of Iraqi citizens in the post-Saddam era was paramount, like its territorial integrity, even if it was not explicitly stated. The equality of citizens was paramount not just because of past grievances, but "[to elevate] the Iraqi character of the state above all considerations of race, ethnicity and religion" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 95). It was seen as an upward spiral that needed to start somewhere. The group on Defense Policy and Institutions noted: "The unity of the region is an essential element in defining the density of both interaction and fusion leading to unity, as well as the dimensions of national unity" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 62). Territorial unity was needed for national unity in identity, and unity in identity was needed to ensure Iraq's territorial integrity. The project of Iraqi identity formation, which had never moved beyond factionalism for a variety of reasons, had to be rebooted.

The project recognized the sectarian, factitious nature of Iraqi society, and the dangers this posed to Iraq's unity, calling its own society "prone to infighting" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 91). The group on Education recommended the requirement of an oath for senior school and university staff, swearing "to serve only the interests of the university or institute, the school and its students and the nation without regard for race, sect, or personal relationships" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 2). The curriculum would have to be overhauled to get rid of "weird concepts of nationalism" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 1). The group on Transparency and Anti-Corruption Measures called for the steering of public debate. Revenues and resources "should be used to focus public opinion on the opportunities available (...). Iraqis need to be convinced, anew, that their future lives will be have [*sic*] greater purpose, as part of the new vision for Iraq, than some more narrowly defined identity as Shia, Sunni, Kurd, Assyrian, Marsh Arab, or as member of some regional tribe or clan" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 74). By focusing on the individual, and personal rights and liberties, "the dangerous but natural inclinations to seek similar protections as part of a regional or identity group, can be prevented and redirected" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 74).

Loyalty to the state of Iraq, and equality in rights, were thus both goals in themselves as well as a means to end. The project members recognized the dangers of factionalism, and the fragility of the Iraqi state without a coercive, strong centralized rule. At the same time, decentralization was needed to prevent future power abuse. Ironically, the very way the strong centralized rule functioned through its system of corruption, inherently promoted factionalism. However, removing the Ba'ath regime from power, would not only remove the coercive centre, holding the state together, but it would also mean the immediate removal of state services insofar as they were accessible, because these did not exist outside of Ba'ath Party control. This would force Iraqis to rely on their personal, tribal, religious, or sectarian network for such services, if they did not already. This, in turn, would be the start of a downward spiral that could further endanger the territorial integrity of Iraq. As the group on Transparency and Anti-Corruption Measures warned: "The people of Iraq are being promised a new future and they will expect immediate results. The credibility of the new regime and the United States will depend on how quickly these promises are translated to reality (...) [the priority should be] streamlining the areas that touches [*sic*] the daily survival needs of the people, eliminating corruption in these delivery systems" (The Future of Iraq Project 2002, 78-79). If Iraq was to become a success after the toppling of Saddam, not only should laws,

systems, and policies be implemented to promote unity; measures should also be taken to prevent the forced reliance on a regional or identity group. Without such measures, Iraq would likely disintegrate, either becoming a country in name only, or cease to exist altogether.

4.3 Operation Iraqi Freedom

The American decision to go to war with Iraq, and remove Saddam from power, suffered from institutional memory loss. The arguments that prevented previous administrations from forcing regime change, were either forgotten, or underplayed. The fear of a power vacuum to be filled by Iran, is omitted altogether. Fears of civil war seem absent, owing to a growing confidence that Iraqis would welcome an American intervention (Freedman 2008). In this period, iterations surface of ensuring, and respecting Iraq's territorial integrity, without the justification of why that should be done.

The growing confidence is evidenced by remarks of war-proponent Cheney: "The streets in Basra and Baghdad are "sure to erupt in joy"", following the war, where the goal would be "an Iraq that has territorial integrity" (Cheney, 2002, as quoted in Freedman, 2008, 429-430). Even those opposing the war seem to have forgotten their own arguments for not deposing Saddam a decade earlier. Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor for the entirety of George H.W. Bush's tenure, focuses his argumentation against the impending invasion of Iraq on the lack of evidence for WMD, and Saddam's own geopolitical point of view. Scowcroft writes that invading Iraq would encourage Saddam to use WMD – indeed if he had any – and that the invasion would result in a long occupation of Iraq by the US, without elaborating on what consequences such an occupation would have for Iraq, or the US (Scowcroft 2002). Scowcroft, too, either omits or forgets the very fears he had a decade earlier: protracted civil war, an expansion of Iranian influence, possible disintegration of Iraq, and regional wars, go unmentioned. Despite a lack of evidence for WMD, and the lack of a proper international coalition, the US invaded Iraq on March 20th, 2003.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, the military operation of the US that started the Second Gulf War, formally began on March 19th, 2003, when president Bush announced the beginning of combat operations. It only formally ended on August 31st, 2010, when the operation was renamed and given new objectives. Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld laid out eight objectives for Operation Iraqi Freedom at the start of the operation. The operation aimed to: (1) end the regime of Saddam Hussein; (2) eliminate Iraq's WMD; (3) capture or

drive out terrorists; (4) collect intelligence on terrorist networks; (5) collect intelligence on Iraq's WMD activity; (6) secure Iraq's oil fields, (7); deliver humanitarian relief, and; (8) transition Iraq to a representative government whilst maintaining its territorial integrity (Garamone 2003).

Saddam was quickly toppled, and eventually captured in December 2003. The omitted fears of what would happen within Iraq, however, soon came to fruition. American forces were unable to pacify the country, resulting in a spiral of violence that was nothing short of civil war. Although Iraq's territorial integrity was not immediately threatened, it hardly resembled a state. Iraqi security forces hardly had any territorial control, nor did US forces. The exacerbation of violence, which peaked in 2006, led the American government to rethink its strategy and options in Iraq. US congress commissioned a bipartisan report, in an effort to identify problems in Iraq, and how the US might handle those problems. The report was compiled by the Iraq Study Group, a group of ten politically attuned individuals, charged with policy recommendations for the US. After its release, G.W. Bush said that "[the US government] ought to pay close attention to what they advise", and viewed the report with such importance that he read it in its entirety himself (Bush and Blair 2006).

4.4 The Iraq Study Group Report

The Iraq Study Group (ISG) was a bipartisan, congressional initiative, and sponsored by the United States Institute for Peace, Rice University, the Center for the Study of the Presidency, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Its report was compiled by ten politically attuned, prominent American experts, who interviewed a host of American, and Iraqi experts, and politicians, to get a thorough assessment of the situation in Iraq, and American policy towards the country. The goal of the report was to recommend policies that would lead to "an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself", which entailed "an Iraq with a broadly representative government that maintains its territorial integrity (...) and doesn't brutalize its own people (...) achieving this (...) will depend primarily on the actions of the Iraqi people" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 31).

In its report, the ISG, refraining from causality, identified many issues within Iraq, and US policy towards it. Broadly speaking, sectarian warfare and corruption were widespread issues in Iraq, with Iranian influence expanding in Iraq acting as an additional destabilizing factor (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006). Sectarian warfare, however, was deemed "the principal challenge to stability" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 6). Iraq was in a state of

civil war. It was the US' responsibility to remedy it, because "American decisions and actions" led to Iraq's current state of affairs (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 9). Iraq was still seen as a country of vital importance, and American FP in Iraq influenced how the US was viewed in the region, and the world. The US thus had a "national and moral interest" to stabilize Iraq (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 9). The solution to stabilizing Iraq was multi-pronged. The report recommends policies through an external, and internal approach.

The external approach relied on a "new diplomatic offensive", requiring an "international consensus" with the goal of "[supporting] the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 32-41). This approach involved constructively engaging Syria and Iran, given their ability "to influence events within Iraq and their interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 7). This new diplomatic offensive, however, seems to assume American ability to persuade these states to cooperate, or the willingness of these states to cooperate towards this end to begin with.

The report assesses that Syria is complacent in "malign neglect" of guarding its borders with Iraq, purposefully allowing arms and foreign fighters to cross its border with Iraq: "Syria is content to see the United States tied down in Iraq" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 25). Iran was benefitting from the situation in Iraq as well. The report acknowledges the stability of the Shi'a south, and Iran's influence on important groups in Iraq, such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Badr Brigades (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006). In the report, an Iraqi official is quoted as saying that "if you turn over any stone in Iraq today, you will find Iran underneath" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 25).

Although Iran is not aided with a disintegrated Iraq, because it might galvanize its own secessionist movements, there is no reason to believe Iran would want to alter the status quo. Iran was even assessed to be supplying Sunni insurgents, who attack US forces (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006). With the removal of Saddam, Iran had a whole new range of strategic options, and avenues of influence that it could explore. As professors at the School of International Relations in Tehran laughingly reminisced in my presence: "The US wiped our nemesis off the geopolitical chessboard overnight". With the US assuming responsibility for the situation in Iraq, and American soldiers bogged down in Iraq for the unforeseeable future, a new front with Iran was unthinkable. Iran, too, was content to see the US tied down in Iraq.

The report quotes an American official as claiming that "Baghdad is run like a Shi'a dictatorship" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 20). Sectarianism, and its enabling patronage

system, were again rampant within Iraq. The chief difference was that the Saddam regime was replaced by a Shi'a patronage network. On sectarian viewpoints, the report writes that "The Shia (...) have gained power for the first time in more than 1,300 years" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 16). In similarity to the 1944 American field manual *A Short Guide to Iraq*, Iraq's 'foreverness' is implicitly claimed by the report. This not only ignores the fact that Iraq as a country is not even a century old, but also the fact that the Iraqi Shi'a had been a part of the Shi'a Persian empire until well into the 18th century. However, for all of the Shi'a empowerment, Iranian influence on the Iraqi Shi'a should not be overstated.

There are scholars that argue Iran would benefit from the disintegration of Iraq, because the Shi'a would look at Tehran for help (F. Gause 2009). However, this does not take into account the rejection of the *velayat-e faqih* – governance by Islamic jurists as used and propagated by the Iranian regime – by the Iraqi Shi'a religious scholars. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the leading Iraqi Shi'a cleric, rejects this idea, and he in turn leads most of the Iraqi Shi'a masses at large (Visser 2005). Perhaps because Iran recognizes this, they focus on key individuals within organizations to influence, as these may be coerced or enticed in ways that organizations or groups as a whole cannot (K. M. Pollack 2017). As Gause himself admits, even though the Second Gulf War "opened the door to increased Iranian influence", if the US "with all its power, cannot organize the Middle East on its own, Iran will hardly be able to do so" (F. Gause 2009, 85).

The internal approach outlined by the ISG report, is titled *Helping Iraqis Help Themselves*. This approach focuses on national reconciliation, bridging the sectarian divides, and shifting responsibility from US forces to that of Iraqi security forces, and Iraq's government. However, with this approach, the report again assumes the possibility of paradoxes.

To bridge the sectarian divide, the report stresses efforts to encourage and facilitate cross-sectarian dialogue. However, the report polled that seventy-nine percent of Iraqis viewed American influence on Iraq as "mostly negative", while sixty-one percent of Iraqis flat-out approved attacks on US-led forces (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 29). This hardly reflects a political climate that provides the US with the political clout to be an actor in this internal approach. Simultaneously, the Iraqis were not going to bridge this divide by themselves. The report recognizes the deeply-rooted mistrust between Iraqis, and the institutionalization of it. The Iraqi police was infiltrated by militias, who used the police as a

means of obtaining weapons, and uniforms, for use in sectarian violence (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006). The report assesses that key players within government often act in their sectarian interest, and that "Each Iraqi ministry has an armed unit", with "questionably loyalties and capabilities", totalling 145,000 armed, uniformed Iraqis (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 14). The Kurds noted that they did not actively pursue independence, because Kurdistan "would be surrounded by hostile neighbors [*sic*]", and therefore still favoured to be part of a unified federal Iraq (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 18). However, because the majority of the Kurds favoured independence, they believed "they could accommodate themselves to either a unified or fractured Iraq" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 18). The Kurds could only be expected to act pragmatically in their own interest. Iraqi leaders, then, had contradictory aims: a unitary Iraq, without bridging the sectarian divides. As the ISG laments: "Iraq's leaders claim that they do not want a division of the country, but (...) leaders have little commitment to national reconciliation (...) [They] are not working toward a united Iraq" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 19). The report argues that a devolution into three regions would result in "mass population movements, collapse of security forces, strengthening of militias, ethnic cleansing, destabilization of neighboring [*sic*] states, or attempts by neighboring [*sic*] states to dominate the regions", and such a devolution would be viewed by Sunni Arabs as the predetermined end-game by the US to weaken a strong Arab state (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 31). The US should therefore support central control as much as possible (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006).

The report recommends to promote the perception of Iraqi efforts on community projects, even though they are funded and executed by the US. However, even if the Iraqi government was successfully viewed as the enabler of community projects, they were poised to be viewed through a sectarian lens. Recommendations to gravitate responsibility of governance and security to the Iraqi government, and Iraqi security forces, ignore the sectarian divide the ISG itself recognizes. Moreover, it assumes Iraqi capability of accepting these responsibilities in the foreseeable future. Although the report lays out specific milestones for the Iraqi government, and Iraqi society as a whole, on which American support should be contingent, this assumes Iraqi willingness to comply. In light of the negative view on American influence by Iraqis, as well as these sectarian divides, such prospects would seem unlikely.

The ISG does offer a path to ready Iraqi government and security forces for these responsibilities: the US should embed more trainers in Iraqi law enforcement, and Iraqi

security forces (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006). However, this assumes that the tactics the US had already been using were in fact effective, but not sufficient in scope. A massive troop surge in the range of 100,000-200,000 additional troops was considered by the ISG, but rejected, because it would affirm the Arab view that the US presence was "intended to be a long-term "occupation"", the American armed forces would not be able to respond properly to other security issues in the world, inability to rotate troops in Iraq, and removing an incentive for the Iraqi government to handle the sectarian divide itself (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 50). A short-term surge was possible "to stabilize Baghdad, or to speed up the training and equipping mission" (Baker, Hamilton, et al. 2006, 50). The latter strategy is what the George W. Bush administration opted for, and became known as 'The Surge'. The Surge was more encompassing in terms of mission statement, yet with fewer troops than the ISG report recommended – 20,000 additional soldiers were deployed, the majority of which were stationed in Baghdad (G. W. Bush 2007).

The Surge sought to pacify Iraq, which statistically seemed to be a success. Violence decreased within Iraq, and this may explain the lack of a change in policy following The Surge. However, there is reason to suggest this is a spurious correlation. Brigham argues that adding Sunni armed factions to the US' payroll caused a decrease in violence, a tactic initiated months before the surge took place (Brigham 2014). Critically engaging the ISG report, then, suggests that although many recommendations were adopted by the US government, the success of these recommendations hinged on wishful thinking. As history would later teach us: The Surge did not monitor a cease-fire, or a peace settlement, but enforced one. As soon as American troops pulled out of Iraq, sectarian conflict was reignited, and violence quickly increased yet again.

4.5 Conclusion: Fear of Concession & Wishful Thinking

The decision to depose Saddam suffered from institutional memory loss, and was in a way a faît accompli. The policies that should be pursued in regards to Iraq, once Saddam had been deposed, still had to be researched for the US government. Research groups paved the policy stream concomitantly with US planning for the invasion of Iraq. The recommendations of the Future of Iraq Project were rife with emphases on national unity for Iraq. None of the project's members wanted to let Iraq disintegrate. It is therefore hard to imagine why the US would consider letting Iraq disintegrate at the time of the invasion.

Three years later, the situation had changed dramatically. Iraq was more fractious than ever, and in a state of civil war. The ISG report identified the main problems for Iraq as sectarian warfare, corruption, and Iranian influence. Although the report offers a range of policies, the success of these policies were contingent on both the willingness, and capability of Iraqis, as well as its Syrian and Iranian neighbours, who were hostile to the US – as were many Iraqis. The policy stream that flows forth from this report builds on wishful thinking.

In this period, the US feared concessions. If it would abandon the project of a unitary Iraq, the US would antagonize the Sunni Arab world by conceding the point that weakening Iraq was their objective from the start. Abandoning the project of a unitary Iraq would concede even more influence to Iran. For the US, the idea of a unitary Iraq was thus contingent on regional dynamics. It did not support the idea of a unitary Iraq for the sake of Iraq's unity, but rather for fear of the consequences Iraq's dissolution might bring. However, the fear of increased Iranian influence, is overplayed. The fear of antagonizing the Sunni Arab world assumes pan-Arab unity, which has historically proven to be little more than idealism. Nevertheless, these fears motivated the US to double-down on the project for a unitary Iraq. It sent more troops, and emphasized efforts of national reconciliation.

The policy stream during the G.W. Bush administrations was filled with policies that aimed to preserve the national unity of Iraq, and its territorial integrity. The US in effect did more of the same in the post-2006 period as it did before, in the hopes that Iraq would stabilize. Retrospectively, the rise of *DAESH* proved them horribly wrong. The underlying causes of sectarian warfare, Iranian influence, and rampant corruption, were not identified, nor were policies recommended to stymie these symptoms. The success of The Surge was a façade. Without handling the underlying causes of sectarian warfare, it would just be a matter of time before Iraq spiralled into a state of civil war yet again.

Conclusion

Say When

This thesis set out to answer the central research question *How has the idea of a unitary Iraq become so persistent in American FP?* To this end, this thesis presented three empirical chapters that traced the process of American FP vis-à-vis Iraq through several periods, analyzed through the theoretical lens of Kingdon's MSF. First, a historical background chapter of American engagement with Iraq between 1920-1993. Second, a chapter zooming in on the evolution of the problem, policy, and political streams of US FP during the Clinton era (1993-2001). The third chapter dealt with American FP during the G.W. Bush administrations (2001-2009). This concluding chapter will bring tie together the findings of the empirical chapters, and answer the central research question. After this, recommendations for future research will follow.

Chapter two focussed on the sub-question *What is the history of a Unitary Iraq in American Foreign Policy between 1920-1993?* In this chapter it became clear that Iraq had long been an important element in broader American strategic thinking, though Iraq was not always a priority. In 1943, when Americans were stationed in Iraq as part of the Second World War, American soldiers were handed a booklet which called Iraq one of the oldest countries in the world. In the view of Americans, then, the existence of Iraq was legitimated – either by taking it for granted or by manufacturing consent – despite secessionist aspirations of Iraqi minority groups within the multi-ethnic, young state of Iraq. At first, the unity of Iraq was thus an issue for Iraqi citizens, not for the Americans. The issue of a unitary Iraq only gained some prominence when the Soviets were trying to gain a foothold in Iraq. This was cause for the Americans to shore up support for Kurdish secessionists. However, this support never went beyond lip-service, and the US never seriously considered the dissolution of Iraq. American FP in Iraq was for a long time contingent on the broader Soviet-containment strategy, and the preservation of regional stability, which the US deemed vital to its interests. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, containment of Iran was added as a strategic objective. After the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, Saddam threatened the stability of the region by annexing Kuwait, and the US intervened militarily. The focussing event where Iraq annexed Kuwait, opened a window of opportunity. The Americans recognized Saddam as the problem, and the policy option of removing him was discussed. However, the political will was lacking. Saddam was allowed to remain in power for fears of the consequences the

break-up of the Iraqi state would bring. Removing Saddam became synonymous with dissolving Iraq, and Iraq's territorial integrity became a priority for the Americans. The Americans saw Iraq as an important counterweight to Iranian expansionism. Moreover, the break-up of the Iraqi state would further destabilize the region in the minds of the Americans, and if the Americans were the cause of this break-up, they would antagonize the wider region, further damaging US' interests and its strategic options. For these reasons, the US feared commitment to the removal of Saddam, and in effect the break-up of the Iraqi state.

Chapter three focussed on the sub-question *How did the problem, policy, and political streams develop over time during the Clinton administrations?* This chapter showed the rise of policy entrepreneurs towards the removal of Saddam from power. Saddam continued to be a nuisance in the eyes of American policy-makers, as he was suspected to be pursuing the acquisition of WMD, while having the will to use them. For the American political elite at large, removing Saddam from power became a pressing concern, and pressure was mounting on president Clinton to remove Saddam from power. To illustrate this, I analyzed the output of the PNAC, and an open letter to the president, sent in February 1998. Both the PNAC and the signatories of the open letter deemed the removal of Saddam from power as the only correct policy to pursue, in light of American interests. The policies of these policy entrepreneurs found their way into the political stream, and congress almost unanimously passed the Iraq Liberation Act in October 1998. American proponents of regime change in Iraq omitted downsides of removing Saddam from power, arguing that it would be seen as a welcome change by their regional allies, if the Americans would put their political and military weight behind such a decision. The Clinton administration, however, saw similar hurdles as the Bush administration did eight years earlier. Although the problem stream remained the same, and the removal of Saddam was a favoured policy option, there was a mismatch between the political will of the cabinet, and that of the wider political elite. A focussing event might have shifted the political will of the cabinet towards the forced removal of Saddam Hussein from power, but this policy was never enacted during the Clinton era. However, the problem, political, and policy streams were geared towards the removal of Saddam from power. From an American perspective, it seemed to be a matter of time before Saddam would be forcibly removed from power through American military strength. The Clinton administration, and its regional allies, saw serious dangers to Iraq's territorial integrity if Saddam would be removed from power. To them, the break-up of Iraq was never an option. Whether the proponents of removing Saddam from power did not fear

the break-up of Iraq as a consequence, or whether this fear was deliberately omitted is unclear. At this stage in history, however, the only thing standing between the forced removal of Saddam from power, and the policy entrepreneurs advocating this policy, was the American cabinet.

Chapter four focussed on the sub-question *What did the policy stream look like during the George W. Bush administrations?* This chapter illustrated the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 as the focussing event the policy entrepreneurs needed. With a president in office surrounded by PNAC members, the political stream was geared towards Saddam's removal. The day of the attacks, Saddam was linked to supporting terrorism. The problem stream had remained the same for the US: Saddam was suspected to successfully pursue WMD, and had a willingness to use WMD. The conviction that threats had to be dealt with before they could manifest, made the decision to remove Saddam from power a faît accompli, and the only viable policy option within the policy stream. It was not clear what the US should do, or what Iraq should look like, once Saddam had been deposed. This was cause for the US State Department to set up the Future of Iraq Project, where 200 Iraqi experts researched what policies should be pursued within Iraq, in a post-Saddam world. Analyzing the 1200 pages of this project, I found that the territorial integrity of Iraq was paramount to the project's members. However, Kurdish support for the territorial integrity of Iraq was contingent on regional dynamics, because the region would not allow the Kurds to secede. Indeed, a land-locked Kurdistan in between states hostile to it could hardly be a viable state. The project stressed national unity and territorial integrity, but warned of the many dangers to such unity and integrity. The American invasion of Iraq failed to negate many of these dangers, and many of the fears that the George H.W. Bush administration, and Clinton administrations had in regards to any decision that would forcibly remove Saddam from power through American military strength, came to fruition. Iraq spiralled into civil war, which was cause for the American government under George W. Bush to re-evaluate the problems within Iraq, and US policy options. The 2006 Iraq Study Group Report found that sectarian warfare was the principle challenge to stability, while corruption, and Iranian influence were widespread, destabilizing issues within Iraq. The report aimed to recommend policies that would result in an Iraq with a representative government that maintains territorial integrity, and did not brutalize its own people. Success of the policies the report recommended hinged on the actions of the Iraqi people, Iraqi willingness to comply with US efforts, and willingness of regional actors to work in tandem with the US. However, the Iraqi

population at large were hostile to US efforts, and hostile towards each other. The most important regional actor, Iran, was content with the status quo. The recommendations of the report built on wishful thinking. Still, the territorial integrity of Iraq was hardly questioned. On the one hand, the US deemed the dissolution of Iraq as highly destabilizing for the region, and a consequence that might aid its Iranian regional rival. On the other hand, Iraqis themselves did not wish to dissolve Iraq. Kurdish politicians reiterated that an independent Kurdistan would be surrounded by hostile neighbours, and thus favoured to remain in a unitary Iraq. However, they believed they could accommodate themselves to both a unified, or fractured Iraq. According to the report, allowing Iraq to fracture would result in a destabilized region, attempts of neighbouring states to dominate the region, strengthening of militias, and ethnic cleansing. Dissolving Iraq was therefore never a serious policy option within the policy stream of American politics.

The question *How has the idea of a unitary Iraq become so persistent in American Foreign Policy?* is then answered through the lack of a policy option to the contrary within the American policy stream, and the lack of policy entrepreneurs advocating such policies. Although the three streams have converged for American politics, dissolving Iraq never entered the policy stream. It was never an option, albeit for evolving reasons throughout the decades since Iraq's inception. In the period after the Second World War, Soviet containment strategies did not allow for such a policy, because it might have resulted in the very thing the US was trying to prevent: Soviet expansionism. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, containment of Iran was added as a strategic objective. A fractured Iraq might increase Iranian influence, rather than contain it. Regional stability would deteriorate from a fractured Iraq, which in turn might negatively impact both the global economy, and US relations with regional states. Dissolving Iraq indeed never was a policy option within the policy stream of American politics. The unity of Iraq, however, is ever present in the policy stream. Not just because of the reasons stated throughout the chapters, but also because Iraq's unity is legitimated through discourse, making the idea of a fractured Iraq difficult to imagine. From the 1943 booklet, calling Iraq one of the oldest countries in the world, to the ISG report stating that Iraqi Shi'a finally rule themselves again after 1,300 years, Iraq as a political entity is continuously sketched as not just legitimate, but also timeless. Through such discourse, Americans ignore historical realities, and delegitimize secessionist aspirations of Iraqi minority groups.

The US feared both commitment and concessions throughout the history of its FP in Iraq. These fears are logical when accepting the assumptions the Americans make, such as increased Iranian influence, and ethnic cleansing as a result of the dissolution of Iraq. However, they are precisely that: assumptions. As I argued in chapter four, Iranian influence is overestimated by the US. Ethnic cleansing is a worst-case scenario that could only logically be expected to manifest if a certain set of factors were present, such as porous borders between any new states, and existing motivation of the population to engage in such atrocities. It is not strange to assume the likelihood of such atrocities, in light of Iraq's track record in human rights abuses. However, precisely this may serve as an argument for a commitment towards Iraq's dissolution. Sectarian warfare has ever been present in the fragile state, and it is unlikely that this will ever change. Deciding on new borders, and securing them, might stop this sectarian warfare once and for all. The arguments against breaking up Iraq relate to the consequences of such a break-up, and not the break-up itself. The regional dynamics that have so far prevented support by the US for the break-up of Iraq are subject to change, and indeed may alter strategic thinking by the US on the matter in the future. This is a hopeful realization for those who aspire to secede from Iraq, because the break-up itself is not seen as problematic, but the consequences are. These consequences may largely be stymied, as has been done before with dissolutions of other states.

The hypothetical dissolution of Iraq, and the requirements needed to make such a policy a success, bares marked semblance to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's break-up first required reduced central power of the federal government. The system Iraq adopted with the 2005 constitution has done so. Growing ethnic tensions within Yugoslavia gave rise to nationalism in its republics. Iraqis increasingly rely on sectarianism, as shown in detail by the ISG report. The Yugoslav Wars that followed the ethnic tensions, when Yugoslavia refused to devolve more powers to its regions, eventually led to the break-up of the state, where an international coalition guarded the new borders. Iraq in the post George W. Bush era has seen increased sectarian violence yet again, and there is no reason to believe this may change in the future. The Kurds want out, although the Kurdish leadership pragmatically opts to stay within Iraq in light of regional hostilities. The majority of Sunnis and Shi'a do not want to dissolve Iraq, but neither did the Serbian majority of Yugoslavia want to break up their state. This should not serve as an argument to keep Iraq together, or dissolve it for that matter, but it does provide a historic precedent.

Iraq seems poised to head into a similar direction as Yugoslavia; it would indeed seem to be a question of when Iraq would dissolve. The next focussing event might bring the problem, policy, and political streams together towards this end. Future research should therefore compare the case of Yugoslavia with that of Iraq. Such research should aim to identify what factors caused the Yugoslav Wars to claim so many victims, as well as what factors made the subsequent dissolution a success in terms of lasting peace and internal stability, and research what policies should be pursued within Iraq to prepare for the scenario of Iraq's dissolution. Although its dissolution is by no means inevitable, there is no academic work on the remaking of states, because it is such a sensitive, and perhaps taboo topic. Taboo as it may be, it is unlikely that Iraq will ascend from its fragile state in the coming decades. The project of a unitary Iraq has cost the American taxpayer $2 trillion since 2003, and 300,000 lives were lost in the process. The end is not in sight. The next crisis within Iraq may be cause for the Kurds to simply declare their independence, and spark a regional war as regional states invade Iraq in order to prevent an independent Kurdistan. America, and the world, would do well to prepare for such an event. It is our duty to minimize human suffering, but we can only do this by first knowing how. Keeping Iraq together, does not seem to be the way.

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