

**Testing the concept of 'neoliberal empire':  
the case of Iraq  
under the Bush and Obama administrations**

Jesse A.J. Korsten

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# 1. Neoliberal empire: the case of Iraq from a theoretical and methodological perspective

## **Research question: 'neoliberal empire' – privatization and marketing**

'The real debate, then, is not whether to have an empire, but what kind.' This quote derives from an article titled 'American Empire, Not 'If' But 'What kind?'" written by foreign policy experts and diplomats James Lindsay and Ivo Daalder in 2003. In 2004 sociologist and global studies expert Jan Nederveen Pieterse argued that the headline of the article sums up the drift of the American media at the time. This would lead Pieterse to tackle the question: What are the characteristics of the contemporary US American empire? Pieterse would address this question in a to this day relevant paper titled 'Neoliberal Empire.' In this article Pieterse argues that a 'Neoliberal Empire' was now succeeding a process of neoliberal globalization, the prevalent regime of American economic unilateralism during the 90's. This new 'empire' merged the practices of empire with those of neoliberalism. According to Pieterse, 'neoliberal empire is a marriage of convenience with neoliberalism and indicated by the inconsistent use of neoliberal policies, and attempt to merge the America whose business is business with the America whose business is war, at a time when business is not doing so well.'<sup>1</sup> Pieterse sees neoliberal empire as a combination of political-military unilateralism with economic unilateralism, 'an attempt to merge geopolitics with the aims and techniques of neoliberalism.'<sup>2</sup> Pieterse uses the occupation of Iraq to provide evidence for his argument.

The shift that has taken place from neoliberal globalization to neoliberal empire, according to Pieterse, has had severe consequences for Americans. According to Pieterse, the cost of the United States pursuing primacy is that the United States had become an authoritarian and conservative society. The result of over-investment in the military is that the United States is now incapacitated in many other spheres. Pieterse sees a country that is undereducated, inward-looking, culturally backward, dependent on foreign borrowing and economically on its knees.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the reliance on the military-industrial complex comes with an authoritarian culture of threat inflation and a stereotyping of the 'rest' of the world. Pieterse argues that the price of primacy is American authoritarianism and the disempowerment of Americans.<sup>4</sup>

To me, Pieterse's article provoked the question: What is its sequel? Pieterse's article to me reads like a book that provides a definite answer to a story that remains unfinished. Pieterse talks about the shift from neoliberal globalization to neoliberal empire as a permanent one. The problem is that he doesn't take into account that a trend may be reversible. A presidency and an administration do not last a lifetime. The Obama administration that would come to power in 2009 was run on a campaign of change, which provided the platform that won him his presidency. The question that then arises is: how does Pieterse's framework of neoliberal empire apply to the Obama administration? Obama had made it clear in his campaign that he opposed the Iraq war from the beginning. Gary Jacobsen, an influential professor of political science specializing in congressional campaigns and election, makes the argument that Bush's decision to invade Iraq may not have been sufficient to produce an Obama presidency. However, it was almost certainly necessary to produce an Obama presidency.<sup>5</sup> According to Jacobsen, not only did the Iraq War help Obama win the presidency over republican nominee John McCain, it also helped him win the democratic nomination over Hilary Clinton. There was a widespread dissatisfaction among 'normal' democrats about George W. Bush and the Iraq War. Clinton had voted in favor of authorizing the Iraq war, while Obama had been opposed to the war from the start. And more generally, Clinton

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', *Theory, Culture and Society* 21 (2004) 3, 119-140, there 123.

<sup>2</sup> Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, 137.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 137.

<sup>5</sup> Gary C. Jacobsen, 'George W. Bush, the Iraq war, and the election of Barack Obama', *presidential studies quarterly* 40 (2008) 2, 207-224, there 207.

represented experience and continuity with the Democratic past and establishment, while Obama had run his campaign on the platform of change. This platform played well with Democratic constituency that wanted a fundamental change.<sup>6</sup>

So, if Obama had been anti-Iraq war in his political career, then how does Obama's becoming president and, more importantly, the installation of a new administration with a different perspective on the Iraq war, impact the framework of neoliberal empire produced by Pieterse based on the Bush's administration's geopolitical approach regarding Iraq? I want to examine if the concept of neoliberal empire is applicable to the Obama administration's implementation of policy as it pertains to Iraq, since Pieterse used 'the occupation of Iraq as a case in point.'<sup>7</sup> The purpose of my research will thus be to test Pieterse's research and contention. I will do this through an examination of the Obama administration's presence in Iraq to account for the gap that currently exists in Pieterse's research. By testing the relevance and applicability of Pieterse's concept of neoliberal empire, the term itself will become more meaningful, as it is now not solely based on the Bush administration. In my opinion this adds to the possible validity of neoliberal empire as a theoretical concept.

The last years have seen plenty of scholarly contributions about Obama and his policies regarding the war on terror. There has also been comparative research comparing Obama to Bush regarding this subject. However, nobody has approached this subject from the framework of neoliberal empire. In my opinion, it would be valuable to look at neoliberal empire from this perspective, since the hypothesis about neoliberal empire from Pieterse has been a valuable one for the concept of American empire that teaches us a lot about the driving forces behind United States foreign policy. In my opinion, this research could also be relevant in the current political climate in the United States: under the Trump presidency the political language has become more unilateral and direct, emphasizing the primacy of the United States with the slogan of 'America First.'

The main question I try to answer is: To what extent can the Obama administration's approach to the American presence in Iraq be seen as a continuation of Pieterse's concept of neoliberal empire in Iraq, during both Obama administrations from 2009 to 2017? The difficulty lies in testing Pieterse's hypothesis. In his article, Pieterse establishes several key differences that indicate a transition from neoliberal globalization to neoliberal empire. I will however not focus on all these changes, since my thesis would then become too broad. The focus of my thesis lies on two key areas of change that Pieterse identifies between neoliberal globalization and neoliberal empire. The first is the heightened emphasis put on the politics of privatization. Privatization was also part of neoliberal globalization, but Pieterse argues that under the Bush II administration privatization is taken to new heights.<sup>8</sup> He argues that the United States shift to combat mode in the wake of 9/11 'facilitated the authoritarian concentration of power, silenced criticism and widened the umbrella of 'security.' Neoliberal practices of outsourcing (to focus on core business) now extend to security and war.'<sup>9</sup> I will therefore take a look at how military privatization manifested itself under the Bush and Obama administrations. The first sub-question is: how did military privatization manifest itself under the Obama administrations and can the policy implementation regarding military privatization be seen as a continuation of the Bush's administration's policy in this area?

The other element I focus on, is the 'marketing' produced by the US governments. Pieterse argues that neoliberal warfare comes with marketing campaigns worthy of corporate causes. Pieterse argues that the Iraq war was carefully marketed as a 'blow for freedom' and that neoliberal business is characterized by an inverse relationship between marketing and the 'product', with more quality and effort going into the marketing than into the actual product.<sup>10</sup> Both the politics of privatization for the US military in Iraq and the and the marketing efforts produced by the US government can be seen as part of the

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<sup>6</sup> Gary C. Jacobsen, 'George W. Bush, the Iraq war, and the election of Barack Obama', 212.

<sup>7</sup> Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', 119.

<sup>8</sup> Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', 124.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 129.

foreign policy produced by the US regarding Iraq. According to Pieterse, the U.S foreign policy changed fundamentally under the Bush administration going from an emphasis on uni-multipolarity, market conformity and financial and market discipline under neoliberal globalization to an emphasis on unipolarity, regime change and military discipline and economic incentives under neoliberal empire.<sup>11</sup> I will focus here on the difference in marketing approach between the Bush and Obama administrations in assessing how Obama's becoming president changed the message regarding the US military presence in Iraq. The second sub-question then becomes: In how far did the message from the US government regarding the US presence in Iraq change during Obama's presidency? In other words, I will examine how US military presence was sold to the national and international public.

The reason I chose these specific two areas of foreign policy is that I think that the 'marketing' frame regarding Iraq and the military privatization supplement each other well. The American foreign policy framing regarding the US presence in Iraq represents the public stance of the administration, where the politics of privatization represents a more hidden and private part of policy. In other words, foreign policy framing is explicit in nature, meaning that it's the public stance from the administration, whereas the politics of privatization is more implicit in nature. I will examine how these two important areas of change fit in the Obama administration's implementation of policy regarding Iraq. In other words I will take, just as Pieterse, Iraq as a case in point and examine if the implementation of foreign policy 'marketing' and politics of privatization by the Obama administration's regarding the American (military) presence in Iraq indicate that the Obama administrations continued Pieterse's notion of a neoliberal empire or if there were significant changes in these areas indicating a breach with neoliberal empire.

### **Theoretical parameters: empire and hegemony**

My analysis tests Pieterse's concept of *neoliberal empire*. When looking at the United States' occupation of Iraq under the Bush administration, Pieterse saw neoliberal empire as a 'marriage of convenience with neoliberalism and indicated by the inconsistent use of neoliberal policies, and attempt to merge the America whose business is business with the America whose business is war, at a time when business is not doing so well.'<sup>12</sup> Pieterse sees neoliberal empire as a combination of political-military unilateralism with economic unilateralism, 'an attempt to merge geopolitics with the aims and techniques of neoliberalism.'<sup>13</sup> Pieterse uses the occupation of Iraq to provide evidence for his argument. His new concept of empire should be placed in a significant bibliography centered around the concept of empire, and more specifically as it pertains to the US. This debate erupted in in the late 1990's and led to new contributions by American and international relations scholars who construct universal political theories regarding empire while considering whether the United States can be perceived as one.<sup>14</sup>

The reason that this debate became so important can be traced back to 1990's with the emergence of the US as the 'only superpower.' After the Second World War, the international order changed from a plural international great power system, where interstates relations were governed by rules – most notably non-interference in each other's internal affairs and a clear-cut distinction between war and peace – to a two superpower system.<sup>15</sup> The end of the Soviet-Union and the overwhelming military superiority of the US ended this power-system. According to Hobsbawm, the strength of the US in high-tech offensive warfare makes it the only state capable of military action in any part of the world on short notice. Hobsbawm states that 9/11 'has enabled a group

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', *Theory, Culture and Society* 21 (2004) 3, 119-140, there 123.

<sup>13</sup> Pieterse, 'Neoliberal Empire', 119.

<sup>14</sup> April Renee Biccum, 'What is an Empire? Assessing the postcolonial contribution to the American Empire debate', *International journal of postcolonial studies* 20 (2018) 5, pp. 697-716.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'War, peace and hegemony at the beginning of the twenty-first century', in: Chandra Chari (eds.): *War, peace and hegemony in a globalized world. The changing balance of power in the twenty-first century* (London 2007) pp. 15-24, there 21.

of political crazies to realize long-held plans for an unaccompanied solo performance of world supremacy.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of American empire has now become common currency and is widely used in both academic and political circles. However, whether empire is actually a useful term to describe the role of the US today, remains a fiercely debated question.<sup>17</sup> According to Charles-Phillippe David, empire and hegemony have different meanings. Empire has a territorial dimension and comes with the implication of control over subjects, whereas hegemony refers to more informal means of subjugation and persuasion over other international actors. Hegemony can be considered more liberal and institutional as opposed to empire, which has more pragmatic and military connotations.<sup>18</sup> The terms are often used interchangeably in contemporary popular discourse. When used more specifically, however, they allow us to trace significant differences in the US hegemony exercised by the Clinton administration and Bush's idea of US empire.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one of the central topics of the empire debate is whether the US is more accurately described as a hegemony than as an empire.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of hegemony derives from Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist theorist, to refer to ideological or cultural processes. However, many scholars today translate the concept as an economic matter. In their case, a *hegemon* is a state that enjoys relative preponderance over the world economy.<sup>21</sup> Many theorists argue that the term hegemony is better way to describe the role of the US. According to them, hegemony has the capacity to encompass the Gramscian concept of consensus and persuasion, while simultaneously highlighting the role of military power and coercion in the evolution of US foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, scholars such as John Agnew and Andrew Hurrell, make the argument for the use of hegemony instead of empire. They argue that hegemony is a less 'intrusive mode of control' than empire and is better describing the power exercised by the U.S in contemporary foreign politics.<sup>23</sup>

Hegemony and empire are both terms that are 'essentially contested'.<sup>24</sup> The rules for defining or applying the term are more ambivalent, then, and no common understanding exists about the core components of the concepts. Accordingly, Nexon and Wright, for instance, state that empires are notoriously difficult to define and that the political communities referred to as empire differ a great deal from one another.<sup>25</sup> In fact, a wide variation exists in types or forms of empire. Moreover, as Biccum argues, the meaning of the word empire has changed over time, and is used both analytically and politically.<sup>26</sup> Still, a distinction that is often made is between the formal (direct) and informal (indirect) ways of exercising power.<sup>27</sup> Formal imperialism represents direct territorial rule. In this case, the empire annexes foreign land and declares official control over it, while subordinating the local population. The newly acquired territory then turns into a colony or dependency. However, the inhabitants of the colony do not enjoy the same rights or privileges as the citizens of the colonizers' home country.<sup>28</sup> Formal empires thus have direct control over the inhabitants of the subjugated territory, while

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<sup>16</sup> Hobsbawm, 'War, peace and hegemony at the beginning of the twenty-first century', 21.

<sup>17</sup> Charles-Phillippe David, 'Revisiting US hegemony/empire', in: Charles-Phillippe David and David Grondin (eds), *Hegemony or Empire. The redefinition of US power under George W. Bush* (Hampshire 2006) pp. 219-225, there 219.

<sup>18</sup> David, 'Revisiting US hegemony/empire', 219.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, 219.

<sup>20</sup> David Grondin, 'Coming to terms with America's liberal hegemony/empire', in: Charles-Phillippe David and David Grondin (eds), *Hegemony or empire. The redefinition of US power under George W. Bush* (Hampshire 2006) pp. 1-20, there 1.

<sup>21</sup> Julian Go, *Patterns of empire. The British and American empires, 1688 to the present* (Cambridge 2011) 8.

<sup>22</sup> Grondin, 'Coming to terms with America's liberal hegemony/empire', 2.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Hurrell, 'Pax Americana or the empire of insecurity', *International relations of the Asia-Pacific* 5 (2005) pp. 153-176, there 153.

<sup>24</sup> Miriam Prys and Stefan Robel, 'Hegemony not empire', *Journal of international relations and development* 14 (2011) pp. 247-279, there 254.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, 'What's at stake in the American Empire debate', *the American political science review* 101 (2007) 2, pp.253-271, there 258.

<sup>26</sup> Biccum, 'What is an empire? Assessing the postcolonial contribution to the American Empire debate', 706.

<sup>27</sup> Go, *Patterns of empire*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, 10.

the inhabitants of this territory become inferior citizens. Partha Chatterjee has named this the 'rule of colonial difference.'<sup>29</sup> In this context, it is important to make a distinction between imperialism and empire. David Abernethy defines imperialism as 'the process of constructing an empire.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, imperialism often leads to empire, but this doesn't necessarily have to be the case, as Bruce Parrot notes. An imperialist foreign policy can fail due to the resistance of a 'targeted' local population or due to the balancing behavior of other great powers.<sup>31</sup>

An example of formal imperialism is the British empire that also exercised control over societies that were not formally colonies. Michael Doyle argues that 'if enough of the articulation of interests in a peripheral state can be influenced, the aggregation of coalitions will be controlled; and if aggregation is thoroughly shaped, sovereign decisions will be controlled.'<sup>32</sup> This is where the concept of 'informal empire' comes into play. 'Informal empire', refers to the exercise of power of both internal and external affairs of 'officially' independent states by a variety of methods minus the actual annexation.<sup>33</sup> The methods of an informal imperial state can be diverse ranging from offering money, access, protection and other resources in exchange for the deference of the dependent society.<sup>34</sup> With respect to both the formal and informal version, Go argues that we must not be too stark in our distinctions. He believes formal and informal empire can be better thought of as two ends in a blurry continuum. In some cases or moments in time, both might be hardened and rigid as distinct types, but not always. Apparently, empires can take a variety of forms and modalities and have a large repertoire of methods, techniques and tactics that can be used to establish, extend and maintain themselves.<sup>35</sup> The distinction between formal and informal empire is just one of the important distinctions that can be made in the debate surrounding the concept of empire.

Whether the US is in fact an empire hinges on whether empire should be defined in broad or narrow terms.<sup>36</sup> A more narrow definition of empire would emphasize it as the sovereign political control over another political entity. An example of this is the definition of Michael Doyle, who defines empire as 'effective control, whether formal or informal, of a subordinated society by an imperial society.'<sup>37</sup> A broader definition of empire concerns more a general imbalance in influence and power. For Charles Maier, for example, empire is just an 'inequality of power resources and influence.'<sup>38</sup>

Paul MacDonald attempts to give structure to the American empire debate by dividing the various scholars into three main categories. The first and most notable group is labelled as *imperial enthusiasts*. To them the US can and should be considered an empire and they consider this to have a positive effect for US citizens, but also for the rest of the world.<sup>39</sup> The second group of authors consists of *imperial critics*. These authors accept the notion of American empire, but believe that this will lead to harmful global consequences.<sup>40</sup> And lastly, the third group of authors consists of *imperial sceptics*. These authors don't see the US as an empire and consider that the strategy the US employs are fundamentally anti-imperial in nature. They do accept that the US has overwhelming military and economic capabilities, however they argue that there are

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<sup>29</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The nation and its fragments. Colonial and postcolonial histories* (Princeton 1993) 14.

<sup>30</sup> David B. Abernethy, *The dynamics of global dominance. European overseas empires 1415-1980* (Yale 2000) 21.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Parrot, 'Analyzing the transformation of the Soviet Union in comparative perspective', in: Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (eds), *The end of empire?* (New York 1997) pp. 3-30, there 8.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca 1986) 37.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Go, *Patterns of empire*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Doyle, *Empire*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Charles S. Maier, 'An American Empire? The problems of frontiers and peace in twenty-first century world politics', *Harvard magazine* (2002) pp.1-4, there 1.

<sup>39</sup> Paul K. MacDonald, 'Those who forget historiography are doomed to republish it: empire, imperialism and contemporary debates about American power', *Review of international studies* 35 (2009) pp.45-67, there 48.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, 49.

many restrictions in place that prevent the US from acting imperially.<sup>41</sup> Nederveen Pieterse belongs to the group of *imperial critics*.

Nederveen Pieterse situates himself within the American empire debate by arguing for an hybrid form of empire that combines features of neoliberal globalization with features of empire.<sup>42</sup> Though some have argued that neoliberal globalization equates to empire, Pieterse is not of that opinion. He describes contemporary globalization as a package deal that includes flexibilization (destandardization in the organization of labor and product), informatization (applications of information technology), and various other changes such as regionalization and reconfiguration of states.<sup>43</sup> Beginning in the 1980's, the growing impact of neoliberal policies have added to the globalization package, marketization (the unleashing of market forces), deregulation (privatization, liberalization), financialization and securitization (conversion of assets into tradable financial instruments), combined with an ideology of lean government.<sup>44</sup> On the basis of this, Pieterse distinguishes between neoliberal globalization and neoliberal empire. Neoliberal globalization centers around economics and finance, whereas neoliberal empire hinges on geopolitics and military and political power.<sup>45</sup>

The new empire Pieterse identifies is *universalistic*: 'Universalistic empires, in their dominant political culture do not recognize other polities as legitimate equals', another way of putting this is 'empire without end.'<sup>46</sup> This notion derives from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is a key text on Roman identity. In it, Jupiter (god of sky and thunder, king of the gods) promises the Romans *imperium* (power), from which empire is derived, meaning power without limits of time or space.<sup>47</sup> Whereas the Roman and the British Empires brought the rule of law as the basis of their claim to constitute a 'Pax',<sup>48</sup> and neoliberal globalization was rule-based, neoliberal empire is not, so Pieterse argues. Neoliberal empire is founded on the rule of power. With respect to this, Pieterse points out that the US 'does not endorse the International Criminal Court, claims preemption from its mandate American nationals, and uses this in negotiation trade and aid'. He argues, that these features are encoded in the Bush Doctrine. The phrase: 'Either you are with us. Or you are with the terrorists', sets the term for universalism, whereas the threat of preventive strike places the US outside international law.<sup>49</sup>

Pieterse's new empire is kaleidoscopic in its nature and deploys the full register of power: military, political, financial, economic and ideological.<sup>50</sup> It combines the practices of empire with those of neoliberalism. The merger of both results in a, what Pieterse dubs, osmosis of neoliberalism and empire.<sup>51</sup> This is clearly not a formal but informal kind of empire.

### **Methodology and case – Iraq**

I make use of a case study as methodological approach by employing a comparative analysis between the Bush and Obama administrations and using Iraq, just as Pieterse, as a case in point. A case study entails an intensive study regarding a person, group of people or a unit that is aimed to generalize over several units. Another, similar, way to describe a case study is that is 'an analysis of systems that are studied with a comprehensive view by either one or several methods.'<sup>52</sup> Jamie Baxter argues that a case study 'involves the study of a single instance or small number of instances of a phenomenon in order to explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual

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<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Pieterse, *Globalization or empire*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Pieterse, *Globalization or empire*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization or empire?* (New York 2005) 32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, 43

<sup>47</sup> Neville Morley, *The Roman empire. Roots of imperialism* (London 2010) 13.

<sup>48</sup> Pieterse, *Globalization or empire*, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Johanna Gustaffson, 'Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: a comparative study', (12 January 2017) <http://hh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1064378/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (10 April 2020), pp. 1-15, there 2.



influences on and explanations of that phenomenon.<sup>53</sup> And Orum et al. define a case study as an 'in-depth, multifaceted investigation using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> In a case study the nature of a the social phenomenon researched can be diverse. It can be an organization; it can be a city; it can be a role; or role-occupants; or an entire group of people.<sup>55</sup> A case can also be a single instance or data point, such as a survey respondent, a subject in an experiment, or the non-occurrence of war between belligerents.<sup>56</sup> A case can also be uniquely historically or geographically bound, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or the Watts riots.<sup>57</sup> This also goes for my case, the U.S occupation of Iraq, which is historically and geographically bound.

Baxter and Jack argue that multiple case studies can be expensive and time consuming.<sup>58</sup> Moreover Siggelkow argues that 'the existence of a phenomenon can opulently be described by single case studies'<sup>59</sup>, whereas Dyer and Wilkins argue that single case studies produce better and more extensive theory as opposed to multiple case studies.<sup>60</sup> Given the limit of this thesis, a fully worked out elaboration of 'neoliberal empire' would be too much. Another important reason to choose for a single case methodology is that Pieterse builds his argument on Iraq, using it as a 'case in point.' Testing his theory on the same unit (Iraq) but under a different variable (administration), is more promising than testing it with another unit, since Pieterse also emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Iraq occupation as a paradigm of his larger theory about *neoliberal empire*.

I apply a comparative analysis between the Obama and Bush administrations, researching continuity and change to contribute to a better, or more comprehensive theory as it pertains to *neoliberal empire*. The comparative method is a preferred strategy for social and political scientist in their researching institutions or macropolitical phenomena, with the macro political unit of analysis being, in this case, the invasion of Iraq and installation of a new government.<sup>61</sup> Arend Lijphart argues for six different types of approaches to case-oriented comparative research: the *atheoretical case study*; the *interpretive case study*; the *hypothesis-generating case study*; the *theory-confirming or theory-infirmiting case study*; and the *deviant case analysis*.<sup>62</sup> My research fits best Lijphart's notions of *theory-confirming or theory infirmiting*, since a single case is examined, here, within a framework of established generalizations. The established generalizations in this case are the elements of Pieterse's definition of neoliberal empire. My goal is to test Pieterse's theory and see whether my research either confirms or infirms it and to what extent. Similar to Lijphart, Harry Eckstein distinguishes between five different types of case oriented studies that can be used in comparative analysis: 1. *configurative-idiographic*; 2. *disciplined-configurative*; 3. *heuristic case study*; 4. *plausibility probes*; 5. *crucial case study*.<sup>63</sup> The type I employ for my research is *disciplined configurative*, because I am testing an already existing theory by using Iraq during the Obama administration as my case study.

<sup>53</sup> Jamie Baxter, 'Case studies in qualitative research', in: *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (eds. Iain Hay) pp. 81-98, there 81.

<sup>54</sup> A. M. Orum, J.R. Feagin and G. Sjoberg, 'Introduction: the nature of the case study', in: J.R. Feagin, A.M. Orum and G. Sjoberg (eds), *a case for the case study* (1991), pp. 1-26, there 2.

<sup>55</sup> Orum, 'Introduction: the nature of the case study', 2.

<sup>56</sup> Juliet Kaarboo, 'A practical guide to the comparative case study method in political psychology', *Political psychology* 20 (1999) 2, pp. 369-391, there 372.

<sup>57</sup> Kaarboo, 'A practical guide to the comparative case study method in political psychology', 372.

<sup>58</sup> P. Baxter and S. Jack, 'Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 13(4), pp. 544-556, there.

<sup>59</sup> Gustaffson, 'Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: a comparative study', 3,

<sup>60</sup> W.G. Dyer and A.L. Wilkins Jr. and K.M. Eisenhardt, 'Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: A rejoinder to Eisenhardt; better stories and better constructs: The case for rigor and comparative logic. *The Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), pp. 613-618, there 618.

<sup>61</sup> Donatella Della Porta, 'Comparative analysis: case-oriented versus variable-oriented research', in: Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating (eds), *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences. A pluralist perspective* (2008), pp. 198-222, there 202.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, 692.

<sup>63</sup> Harry Eckstein, 'Case study and theory in political science', in: Robert Gromm, Martin Hammersley and Peter Foster (eds), : *Case study method: key issues, key texts* (London 2000) pp. 119-164, there 132-133.

According to Flyvbjerg, one common misunderstanding about case studies is that the case study method is most useful for generating hypotheses.<sup>64</sup> Instead, Eckstein argues that 'case studies are valuable at all stages of the theory-building process, but most valuable at that stage of theory-building where least value is generally attached to them: the stage at which candidate theories are tested.'<sup>65</sup> In relation to this, Flyvbjerg argues that the testing of hypotheses directly relates to the question of 'generalizability', which in turn relates to the question of case selection.<sup>66</sup> The generalizability of cases can be increased by the strategic selection of cases. Here, Flyvbjerg distinguishes between two categories of strategies in order to select samples for research: 1. *random selection*; 2. *information-oriented selection*.<sup>67</sup> I use information-oriented selection, since I focus on a single case study, and both the case and its subcategories have been selected based on the expectations about their information content. The category of information-oriented selection can be divided, in turn, into four subcategories: a.) *extreme/deviant cases*; b.) *maximum variation cases*; c.) *critical cases*; d.) *paradigmatic cases*.<sup>68</sup> My research fits in Flyvbjerg's subsections of both *critical* and *paradigmatic cases*, because Nederveen Pieterse uses Iraq as 'a case in point' that permits him the deduction of a type whereas at the same time this case is paradigmatic. I work the other way around: I use Iraq as a paradigmatic case in order to critically assess its typicality.

I employ predominantly a qualitative approach and partly a quantitative approach. Quantitative research can be defined as research that explains phenomena according to numerical data which are then analyzed by means of mathematically based methods. One of the most used methods is statistical analysis.<sup>69</sup> From a broader perspective, quantitative research can be defined as a type of empirical research into a human problem or social phenomenon by using a theory consisting of variables, which are measured with numbers and analyzed by using statistics in order to determine whether the theory can explain or predict phenomena and interests.<sup>70</sup> In my case this consists in comparing data about private military contributions, in consecutive years, taking into account the US citizenship of actors etc.

Qualitative research is deemed more difficult to define. According to Hitchcock and Hughes, this derives from its multifaceted nature and different paradigms.<sup>71</sup> Still, Strauss and Corbin provide the following definition: 'By the term 'qualitative research' we mean any type of research that produces findings not arrived by statistical procedures or other terms of quantification.'<sup>72</sup> According to Yilmaz, this definition is simplistic since it focusses on techniques and procedures that are used in order to collect and analyze data, meanwhile other aspects of research design are ignored. Another problem with Strauss and Corbin's definition is that it defines qualitative research from a quantitative perspective instead of focusing on its own characteristics.<sup>73</sup> Drawing on recent literature,<sup>74</sup> Yilmaz defines it as an 'emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world.'<sup>75</sup> Denzin and Lincoln argue that qualitative research privileges no single methodological practice over another, it does not belong to

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<sup>64</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research', in: Clive Seale et al. (eds), *Qualitative research practice* (2004), pp. 390-404.

<sup>65</sup> Eckstein, 'Case study and theory in political science.'

<sup>66</sup> Flyvbjerg, 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research', 395.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, 395-396.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, 396-397.

<sup>69</sup> Kaya Yilmaz, 'Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences', *European journal of education* 48 (2013) 2, pp. 311-325, there 311.

<sup>70</sup> Yilmaz, 'Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research', 311.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, 311.

<sup>72</sup> A.L. Strauss and J. Corbin, 'Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory' (1998) 11-12.

<sup>73</sup> Yilmaz, 'Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research', 311.

<sup>74</sup> J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among free traditions* (2007) pp. 37; N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research* (2005) pp. 3; M. Miles and M. Huberman, *Qualitative data analysis* (1994) pp. 6-7; M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (2002) pp. 37-39.

<sup>75</sup> Yilmaz, 'Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research', 312.

a single discipline and it has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own.<sup>76</sup> Qualitative research 'draws on philosophical ideas in phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and other traditions to support the attention on 'quality' rather than 'quantity'.<sup>77</sup>

In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research has struggled to legitimize itself. It's focus on social meanings is often been seen as less reliable in comparison to numerical data, by the preference of governments, policy makers and other users that prefer 'hard facts.' In popular culture preference and authority has often been given to numbers, 'with meanings appearing ephemeral and elusive.'<sup>78</sup> Snape and Spencer state that 'providing a precise definition of qualitative definition is no mean feat.'<sup>79</sup> Samuel Barkin argues that the term 'qualitative' evokes a narrative or analytical richness, a methods that lends itself for bringing out more detail and nuance. But in practice, the term is mostly used to simply mean 'not quantitative.'<sup>80</sup> I will use it in a positive sense when analyzing the National Security Strategies and speeches by Bush and Obama. The next chapter combines qualitative and quantitative research in considering how military privatization manifested itself under the Obama administrations. The combination of the two helps me to answer the question whether the policy implementation regarding military privatization during the Obama presidency can be seen as a continuation of the Bush's administration's policy in this area.

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<sup>76</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> J.D. Brewer, 'Qualitative research', in: R.L. Miller and J.D. Brewer (eds.), *The A-Z of social research: a dictionary of key social science research concepts*

<sup>78</sup> Brewer, 'Qualitative research', 239.

<sup>79</sup> D. Snape and L. Spencer, 'The foundations of qualitative research', in: J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds.), *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers* (2003), pp. 1-23, there 3.

<sup>80</sup> Samuel Barkin, 'Qualitative' methods?', in: Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (eds.), *Qualitative methods in international relations* (New York 2008) pp. 211-220, there 212.

## 2. US Military privatization in Iraq

Mercenaries are as old as war itself, often being referred to as the second-oldest profession. Nearly every past empire has contracted foreign troops in some form or another.<sup>81</sup> Nonstate violence is thus by no means a novel development. It has dominated the international system in the past. Singer argues that in a broad view of history the state itself is a rather new unit of governance, which has only appeared in the last four hundred years.<sup>82</sup> After the Thirty Years' war states began to consolidate their monopoly of force, with the Peace of Westphalia (1648).<sup>83</sup> If the Westphalian notion of sovereignty stipulated that states put (their) private armies out of business, Napoleonic reforms helped consolidating the state monopoly of force.<sup>84</sup> Napoleon's armies consisted mostly of French citizens assembled under *levée en masse*, the famous act of conscription, which called upon all of French society to contribute to the war efforts in August of 1793.<sup>85</sup> The revolutions during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century also established a bond between the individual and the state, which in turn gave rise to nationalism and created a link between military service and patriotic duty.<sup>86</sup> Sean McFate makes two points with regard to this. Firstly, in order for states to govern as the only authority within their territory, they needed a monopoly on force in order to uphold their rule of law. Threats to this monopoly were prohibited, such as the use of mercenaries. Secondly, the Westphalian system established that states were responsible for trans-border violence, even if the state itself did not support that violence. This led to states prohibiting armies out of fear that they might start a conflict, which could drag states into war with one and other.<sup>87</sup>

McFate, falling back on Max Weber, defines the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.'<sup>88</sup> However, private armies were resurrected shortly after the end of the Cold War.<sup>89</sup> Singer argues that 'almost overnight' an entire global order collapsed.<sup>90</sup> The end of the superpower rivalry resulted in military downsizing.<sup>91</sup> The military downsizing by the US led to studies in the early 1990's regarding the military capabilities needed to fulfill future military requirement. The fear was that the force structure would be insufficient in size. DoD and U.S army policymakers concluded that one way to meet future military needs was to hire personnel from the private sector. The military downsizing provided both 'push and pull' factors for the private military industry. 'On the one hand, demobilized military personnel and decommissioned equipment provided a ready supply of capacity, while on the other, demand increased as rich countries became more reluctant to intervene in unstable parts of the globe and abandoned previous Cold War allies or clients to their own devices.'<sup>92</sup>

According to Singer, there were two other factors necessary for the emergence of the private security industry. The first factor consists of the broad transformations that developed in the nature of warfare itself. These transformations have created new market opportunities and new demands for Private Military Security Companies (PMSC's). The second factor is the so-called 'privatization revolution.'<sup>93</sup> This 'privatization revolution' is part of the process of neoliberalism, which is instrumental for Pieterse's thesis of neoliberal empire; a process generally traced back to the policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

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<sup>81</sup> Peter W. Singer, *Corporate warriors. The rise of the privatized military industry* (Ithaca 2007) 19.

<sup>82</sup> Singer, *Corporate warriors*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> Sean McFate, 'The evolution of private force', in: Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 65-75, there 69.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, 69.

<sup>85</sup> John A. Lynn, *Battle a history of combat and culture. From Ancient Greece to modern America* (New York 2003) 184.

<sup>86</sup> McFate, 'The evolution of private force', 70.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, 70.

<sup>88</sup> Sean McFate, 'The evolution of private force', 65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Singer, *Corporate warriors*, 49.

<sup>91</sup> Abrahamsen and Leander, 'Introduction', 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Singer, *Corporate warriors*, 49.

Neoliberalism is often described as a package deal, containing deregulation (liberalization, privatization), financialization and securitization (the conversion of assets into tradeable financial instruments), marketization (unleashing market forces), combined with the ideology of lean government.<sup>94</sup> Singer argues that the 'privatization revolution' provided the logic, legitimacy and models for markets to enter into formerly state domains.<sup>95</sup> In this context, Abrahamsen and Leander argue that the definition of state, in the traditional Weberian sense, as the 'monopoly of legitimate use of force' has become increasingly out of sync with reality. They make the argument that private security has now become an intrinsic aspect of modern life.<sup>96</sup>

### **Iraq as a most likely case of military privatization**

According to Stanley Bruce operation Iraqi freedom, ranging from March 2003 to December 2011, can be seen as a *most likely* case, similar to Eckstein's notion of crucial case study,<sup>97</sup> due to the criterion of contractor presence.<sup>98</sup> Bruce states that the size and the budget of US military operations during operation Iraqi Freedom were significantly lower than during the peak cold war levels. The intervention lasted over eight years, in which the U.S faced competing conflicts around the world. Due to all these reasons, it was likely that the US would have to rely on the private security industry for significant support.<sup>99</sup> The fact that operation Iraqi freedom can be considered a most likely case, makes it ideal for my research regarding the use of private military companies by the US in Iraq. I will however not limit myself to the period of operation Iraqi Freedom, but look at the entirety of the Obama administrations' presence in Iraq.

The privatization and outsourcing of war falls under the conceptual umbrella of surrogate warfare. Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli define surrogate warfare as the externalization of the burden of warfare in all the forms this may take to substitutionary or supplementary forces and platforms.<sup>100</sup> Krieg argues that amid the globalization and transnationalization of conflict the state has discovered that surrogate warfare can be used to 'externalize, partially or wholly, the strategic, operational and tactical burden of warfare to human or technological surrogate with the principal intent of minimizing the burden of warfare for its own taxpayers, soldiers and policymakers.'<sup>101</sup> In the context of surrogate warfare it is telling that US military contracting dramatically increased after 9/11. The US needed manpower to fight its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and was already suffering from a man-power shortage. Especially for the conflict in Iraq a large number of contractors was needed.<sup>102</sup> This led to a significant increase in the use of PMSC's, which resulted in a use of contractors that was unprecedented in both its size and scope.<sup>103</sup> A new type of contractor emerged, one that carried guns and undertook contracts that allowed the use of deadly force.

The development blurred the definition of what used to be a 'inherently governmental' function.<sup>104</sup> Martha Lizabeth Phelps argues that the US' dramatic increase in military contracting is most clearly demonstrated in comparison to domestic troop counts. By 2004, private contractors came to exceed British national troops and by 2006, the period in which the heaviest fighting took place, the number of private contractors

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<sup>94</sup> Pieterse, *Globalization or empire*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Singer, *Corporate warriors*, 49.

<sup>96</sup> Rita Abrahamsen and Anna Leander, 'Introduction', in: Rita Abrahamsen and Anna Leander (eds.), *Routledge handbook of private security studies* (New York 2016) pp. 1-9, there 1.

<sup>97</sup> Eckstein, 'Case study and theory in political science', 143-144.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley E. Bruce, *Outsourcing security. Private military contractors and US foreign policy* (Lincoln 2015) 127.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce, *Outsourcing security. Private military contractors and US foreign policy*, 128.

<sup>100</sup> Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickly, 'Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?', *Defence studies* 18 (2018) 2, pp.113-130, there 115.

<sup>101</sup> Andreas Krieg, 'Externalizing the burden of war: the Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East', *International affairs* (2016) pp. 97-113, there 99.

<sup>102</sup> Martha Lizabeth Phelps, 'Supporting the troops. Military contracting in the United States', in: Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 9-19, there 14, 15.

<sup>103</sup> Singer, 'Can't win with them', 2.

<sup>104</sup> Phelps, 'Supporting the troops', 15.

exceeded that of US national troops.<sup>105</sup> Adam Moore argues that the growth of military contracting in recent years is a significant development that shows a fundamental change in how the US conducts its wars. New is not reliance on private companies and labor to support US military campaigns, which has a long history, but rather the scale and scope of this phenomenon.<sup>106</sup> During World War II the ratio of contractors to US military personnel was around 1:7 and in Vietnam this ratio was at 1:6. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the total numbers of contractors became roughly equal to the number of US military personnel.<sup>107</sup> Moore states that the US has now become dependent on contracted labor, most notably in the realm of logistics in order to fight its wars.<sup>108</sup>

### **Private Military Security Companies: different types of contractors**

Much of the attention has been focused on contractors that carry firearms. However, the vast majority of contracts concerns supply and support services.<sup>109</sup> This is why Berndtsson and Kinsey argue that a distinction must be made between armed security contractors and military contractors. Military services are often portrayed the same. However logistics and security services are something different. Berndtsson and Kinsey argue that contractors have always supported military operations, whereas the provision of private security is something fairly new. They add to this by arguing that outsourcing support services and logistics is less controversial politically as opposed to outsourcing armed protection.<sup>110</sup>

The Commission on Wartime Contracting (CWC), which was established by Congress in 2008, divided the services provided to the US government into three main categories: logistics, security and reconstruction.<sup>111</sup> Logistic services consists of supply of food, fuel, laundry services and base facility construction. During the early years of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US Army's logistics civil augmentation contract (also known as LOGCAP) was awarded to Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR). In June of 2007 a new LOGCAP contract (LOGCAP IV) was given to three companies: DynCorp International, Fluor Intercontinental and KBR.<sup>112</sup> In Iraq alone, the LOGCAP contract between 2003 and 2007 awarded obligations totaling 22 billion dollar.<sup>113</sup>

Security services consist of guarding people, convoys and buildings. These are the tasks that are most similar to those performed by US soldiers. Security contractors are often times armed. They frequently shoot, or are shoot at, in carrying out their duties. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that somewhere between 30.000 to 35.000 contractors working in Iraq were armed.<sup>114</sup> The company formerly known under Blackwater (the name changed into Xe and is currently known as Academi)<sup>115</sup> received notoriety whilst providing security in Iraq supporting both the US military and State Department. Blackwater personnel operating in Iraq fell under the State Department's Worldwide Personal Protective Services (WPPS) contract, which allowed them to carry

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<sup>105</sup> Martha Elizabeth Phelps, 'Supporting the troops. Military contracting in the United States', in: Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 9-19, there 16.

<sup>106</sup> Adam Moore, *Empire's labor. The global army that supports US wars* (Ithaca 2019) 4.

<sup>107</sup> Moore, *Empire's labor. The global army that supports the US wars*, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Ibidem, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Joakim Bendtsson and Cristopher Kinsey, 'Introduction', in: Joakim Bendtsson and Cristopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 1-6, there 4.

<sup>111</sup> Commission on wartime contracting, 'At what cost? Contingency contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan' (version June 2009)

[https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/cwc/20110929221553/http://www.wartimecontracting.gov/docs/CWC\\_Interim\\_Report\\_At\\_What\\_Cost\\_06-10-09.pdf](https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/cwc/20110929221553/http://www.wartimecontracting.gov/docs/CWC_Interim_Report_At_What_Cost_06-10-09.pdf) (1 June 2020).

<sup>112</sup> Avant, 'The mobilization of private forces after 9/11', 210.

<sup>113</sup> Congressional Budget Office, 'Contractor support of US operations in Iraq' (version August 2008), <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/110th-congress-2007-2008/reports/08-12-iraqcontractors.pdf> (1 June 2020).

<sup>114</sup> Congressional Budget Office, 'Contractor support of US operations in Iraq.'

<sup>115</sup> Nathan Hodge, 'Company once known as Blackwater ditches XE for yet another new name' (version December 12, 2011), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204319004577089021757803802> (31 May, 2020).

weapons, have their own helicopters and fight off insurgents in ways that are hard to distinguish from military actions.<sup>116</sup>

Reconstruction services consist of building, from physical infrastructure to institutions. Examples of physical infrastructure are roads, water, communication and power. Examples of institutions range from providing training for military, police, justice personnel and other employees of government to the supporting of civil society group and promoting the rule of law and democratization. These services are provided by a wide range of PMC's. DynCorp was important in this sphere, training police, constructing police and prison facilities and building capacity for justice systems.<sup>117</sup>

### **The use of PMSC's by the Bush administration**

There exist few data about the number of contractors in the early years of the conflict. The reason is that the US government did not collect this information.<sup>118</sup> This is why McFate argues that the primary obstacle on research regarding the private military industry is the lack of data available. Private military firms can be more obscure than US military or intelligence agencies. This derives from the fact that they are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act or other similar legislative tools for imposing transparency.<sup>119</sup> Micah Zenko, in studying the role that contractors played in military operations, noticed there is no easy way to assess this role given the absence of data.<sup>120</sup> The US government offers no practical overview, especially for the decade after 9/11. US Central Command (CENTCOM) only started to release data on contractors from the second half of 2007 onward.<sup>121</sup>

Data that are available in the first years of the conflict concern the amount of money allocated by the US government to contractors operating in Iraq. In 2008 the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), a federal agency that provides budget and economic information to Congress, came out with a report titled 'Contractors' support of US operations in Iraq.'<sup>122</sup> This paper covers the period from 2003 to 2007 and provides an overview of contracting in Iraq.<sup>123</sup> In this period the US spent more than 85 billion dollars on contracts.<sup>124</sup> However the CBO states that this number doesn't account for the entire US spending as it pertains to Iraq, because it doesn't include the costs of contracts supporting operations in Iraq, but are performed in countries outside Iraq.<sup>125</sup> One example of this is the military equipment manufactured for use in Iraq. The CBO also comes with an estimate, on the basis of data collected from the DOS, USAID and DOD, regarding the number of contractor personnel that work in Iraq. It estimates that 190.00 contractor personnel work on contracts funded by the US government, making the ratio of US military members in Iraq to US funded contractor employees approximately 1:1.<sup>126</sup> The CBO estimates that around 20 percent of these contractors was US citizen. Local nationals, defined by the CBO as citizens of the country in which they are working, make up another 40 percent of the contractor personnel. The last 40 percent consists of third-country nationals, who are neither local nationals nor US citizens.<sup>127</sup> This makes the private security workforce in Iraq truly a transnational phenomenon.

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<sup>116</sup> Avant, 'The mobilization of forces after 9/11', 211.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 211.

<sup>118</sup> Deborah Avant, 'The mobilization of private forces after 9/11. Ad hoc response to inadequate planning', in: James Burk (eds.), *How 9/11 changed our ways of war* (Stanford 2013) pp. 209-231, there 209.

<sup>119</sup> Sean McFate, *The modern mercenary. Private armies and what they mean for world order* (Oxford 2014) 29.

<sup>120</sup> Micah Zenko, 'Mercenaries are the silent majority of Obama's military' (version May 18, 2016), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/18/private-contractors-are-the-silent-majority-of-obamas-military-mercenaries-iraq-afghanistan/> (June 4, 2020).

<sup>121</sup> Moshe Schwartz and Joyprada Swain, 'Department of defense contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: background and analysis', *Congressional research service* (2011) pp. 1-32, there 4.

<sup>122</sup> Congressional Budget Office, 'Contractor support of US operations in Iraq' (version August 2008), <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/110th-congress-2007-2008/reports/08-12-iraqcontractors.pdf> (1 June 2020) pp.1-28.

<sup>123</sup> CBO, 'Contractor support of US operations in Iraq'.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem, 2.

<sup>126</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, 8.

The amount of contractors that have died during the Bush presidency in Iraq is not easily available. Bernd Debusmann estimates that as of July 2007, the contractor death toll passed one thousand, and another 13,000 wounded. These data are limited however, in that they only account for insurance claims made by contractors' employers and reported to the US Department of Labor.<sup>128</sup> The deaths of contractor are not officially counted in the Pentagon's death tolls.<sup>129</sup> These contractor death statistics mean that the private military industry has suffered more losses in Iraq than the totality of the rest of the allied forces combined.<sup>130</sup> When US soldiers die in service of their country abroad, the Pentagon issues a detailed news release and the service member's death appears on the 'casualty status' website, which is constantly updated.<sup>131</sup> However this is not the case for contractors. Their employers are, in theory, required to report their death, after which family members can file a claim for insurance compensation, after which a case is created. To complicate matters even further, sometimes contracting activities are subcontracted to host nationals, that can fail to report deaths to the original contractor due to improper documentation or a lack of literacy. Zenko derives from this that contractor fatalities are almost certainly undercounted.<sup>132</sup> Singer argues that contractor deaths are regarded by policy makers as almost a 'positive externality', in that the public doesn't usually hear about contractor losses. And even when they do, this has far less blowback on the US government.<sup>133</sup>

### **Why PMSC's were employed by the Bush administration**

As mentioned earlier, the US, was already short on man-power and needed personnel for the conflict in Iraq. Deborah Avant argues that increasing privatization was not an intentional policy but rather an 'ad hoc response' to poor planning for troop requirements.<sup>134</sup> She argues that the increase in use of PMSC's after 9/11 was not according to a plan but according to a need.<sup>135</sup> She states: 'Although politicians cast terrorism as an existential threat, and although military analysts suggested that a constabulary force would be best suited to meeting such a threat, the Bush administration did not believe it could or should sell mobilization of such a force to the American public, even immediately after 9/11. Privatization was not a response to 9/11; it was a tool to fill the mobilization gap created by poor judgment about force requirements after 9/11.'<sup>136</sup> Avant's reasoning makes it seem like the Bush administration had little choice but to rely on private military companies.

Singer argues that it is not that the US had no other choices, yet that the other choices were considered politically undesirable.<sup>137</sup> Other solutions could have been to send more regular forces. However this would have involved publicly that those involved in planning, specifically Secretary Rumsfeld, were wrong. Another option would have been a call-up of the Reserves and the National Guard. This would have resulted in massive outcry among the public. A third option could have been to persuade other allies to send more troops in. However, to do so would have involved tough compromises, such as granting NATO or U.N. command of the forces.<sup>138</sup>

The private military industry provided an answer to these problem, an answer that had not existed for policymakers in the recent past. It could serve as a potential backstop of additional forces, without having to lose political capital. There was no outcry when

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<sup>128</sup> Bernd Debusmann, 'In outsourced US wars, contractor deaths top 1,000' (version July 3, 2007), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iraq-contractors/in-outsourced-u-s-wars-contractor-deaths-top-1000-idUSN0318650320070703?sp=true> (June 3, 2020).

<sup>129</sup> Habib Moody, 'The private contractor's fighting America's wars', *Center for the study of technology and society* (2007) pp. 122-127, there 126.

<sup>130</sup> Singer, 'Can't win with them, can't go to war without them', 4.

<sup>131</sup> Zenko, 'Mercenaries are the silent majority of Obama's military.'

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>133</sup> Zinger, 'Can't win with them, can't go to war without them', 4.

<sup>134</sup> Avant, 'The mobilization of private forces after 9/11', 210.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem, 210.

<sup>136</sup> Avant, 'The mobilization of private forces after 9/11', 226.

<sup>137</sup> Singer, 'Can't win with them, can't go to war without them', 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibidem, 3.



contractors were called upon and deployed, or, as shown earlier, lost.<sup>139</sup> Singer argues that private military industry by now has become the ultimate enabler. It allows operations to happen that might otherwise be politically impossible.<sup>140</sup> Berndtsson and Kinsey add that PMSC's can be understood in certain situations as strategic tools of government and as a means to exercise power and promote national interests, while simultaneously steering clear of some of the pitfalls in international politics. They argue that the use of PMSC's is not only operational or tactical, but also part of a larger picture of power, politics and interests at the national and international levels.<sup>141</sup> The US' increased reliance on PMSC's thus affects the US' foreign policy. For a long time foreign policy was the domain of the state and involved state-to-state interactions undertaken by diplomats. Renee de Nevers argues that this is no longer the case. Three changes complicate our understanding of foreign policy today.<sup>142</sup>

The first change that Nevers identifies is an increasingly globalized world, which brings with it the challenge of defining national interests, when states confront challenges, ranging from terrorism to climate change, that require multilateral solutions.<sup>143</sup> The second is the erosion of the state's role in pursuing its foreign policy. New government agencies and non-state actors have become players in the field of government-to-government interaction, which had formerly been the diplomatic realm.<sup>144</sup> The third challenge particularly applies to the US and concerns the blurring of lines between foreign policy and national security policy. The response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 led to a climate of insecurity and pervasive threat. This was heightened by the expanded role of the DOD. Functions formerly undertaken by the State Department where now allocated to the DOD. This has put a military face on US foreign policy to a degree that differentiates it from other liberal democratic states.<sup>145</sup>

The militarization of US foreign policy has led to PMSC's becoming important international actors that affect foreign policy. De Nevers states: 'PMSC's shape foreign and security decisions through private involvement in intelligence, policy analysis, and training of government officials and troops. Increasingly PMSC's help shape the way the states see the world, through their risk and security analysis and consulting services.'<sup>146</sup> Some private security activities in support of foreign policy include protection, logistics and reconstruction functions. De Nevers shows that PMSC's increasingly conduct security sector reform activities and provide military training, previously a major part of US foreign aid. They can also act as foreign policy proxies enabling them to extend foreign influence for the governments that employ them.<sup>147</sup> PMSC's have become virtually indispensable for the US' foreign and security policy. The US is now no longer able to engage in in many foreign policy areas without reliance on private actors.<sup>148</sup>

PMSC's can have direct and indirect effects on foreign policy. A specialized PMSC can be hired to perform a specific task, which may lead to a effectively implemented policy, potentially at a reasonable cost. This can facilitate a state's foreign policy goals. However, a PMSC can also take on task that enable it to shape perceptions of foreign policy and national interest. This has raised questions about whether corporate and national interests coincide with one another.<sup>149</sup> A PMSC can have an impact on foreign policy is if its actions elsewhere color the perceptions of the home state, either negatively or positively.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, 4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>141</sup> Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey, 'Conclusion', in Joakim Berndtsson and Cristopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 312-315, there 313-314.

<sup>142</sup> Renee de Nevers, 'Private security's role in shaping US foreign policy', in: Rita Abrahamsen and Anna Leander (eds.), *Routledge handbook of private security studies* (New York 2016), pp. 168-176, there 168.

<sup>143</sup> Nevers, 'Private security's role in shaping US foreign policy', 168.

<sup>144</sup> Ibidem, 168.

<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, 168.

<sup>146</sup> Ibidem, 175.

<sup>147</sup> De Nevers, 'Private security's role in shaping US foreign policy', 175.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, 175.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, 168.

<sup>150</sup> Ibidem, 168.

Private military companies give states an increased capacity and flexibility, the two most commonly noted benefits regarding military outsourcing.<sup>151</sup> The increased capacity is not only relevant as it pertains to providing manpower when needed, but it also allows to draw upon specialized skill sets that may not be maintained in the military.<sup>152</sup> The increased flexibility shows itself in providing government bureaucracy with organizational improvisation, which is not seen in the public sector. PMSC's often have a workforce ready that are able to begin work within matter of days or weeks after signing a contract. Another part of the advantage of increased flexibility is political in nature. It allows governments to operate with fewer 'military boots' on the ground and maintain military capacity without an increase in military manpower.<sup>153</sup>

### **Obama's reliance on PMSC's**

Now that I have looked at the manifestation of PMSC's in Iraq under the Bush administration and why it was attractive for the Bush administration to deploy private military contractors on a therefore unprecedented scale, it is time to examine if this reliance on military contractors continued under the Obama presidency. For this analysis I will make use of reports from government agencies, such as the Congressional Research Service, CENTCOM and the Commission on Wartime Contracting, because from the second half of 2007 onward, more data and reports became available regarding the use of contractors.

Between 2007 and 2009 the security situation in Iraq continued to improve, which led the newly elected president Barack Obama to call for a withdrawal of all US troops by December 2011. This announcement was in line with the earlier agreed on 2009 US-Iraqi security agreement, which mentioned the complete withdrawal of all US forces.<sup>154</sup> In his speech, given at camp Lejeune, Obama stated that the US wanted to 'pursue a new strategy to end the war in Iraq through a transition to full Iraqi responsibility.'<sup>155</sup> This strategy consisted of three parts: a responsible removal of US combat brigades and the complete removal of forces from Iraq by the end of 2011, a 'sustained diplomacy on behalf of a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq', and finally, a comprehensive engagement across the region and the establishment of a new framework that advances both Iraq's and the region's security.<sup>156</sup>

Obama wanted to adopt a more multilateral security strategy. He argued: 'we can no longer deal with regional challenges in isolation – we need a smarter, more sustainable and comprehensive approach. That is why we are renewing our diplomacy, while relieving the burden on our military.'<sup>157</sup> As it pertains to the private military industry, Obama stated that he wanted to change one of the Bush administration's priorities, namely the huge number of contracts awarded to the private industry. With regard to this, Obama said: 'there is a fundamental public trust that we must uphold. The American people's money must be spent to advance their priorities, not to line the pockets of contractors or to maintain projects that don't work.'<sup>158</sup> Obama also stated: 'we cannot win a fight for hearts and minds when we outsource critical missions to unaccountable contractors.'<sup>159</sup> These are all statements made by Obama at the beginning of his presidency. Yet do the data support the statements made by Obama in this regard?

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<sup>151</sup> Molly Dunigan, 'The consequences of outsourcing military support functions', in: Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp. 241-254, there

<sup>152</sup> Dunigan, 'The consequences of outsourcing military support functions', 245.

<sup>153</sup> Ibidem, 246, 247.

<sup>154</sup> Daniel Zwerdling, 'Obama cracks down on government contractors' (version March 5, 2009) <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101465347&t=1551899783684&t=1590441518054&t=1592243242182> (June 14, 2020).

<sup>155</sup> The White House, 'Remarks of president Barack Obama. Responsibly ending the war in Iraq' (version February 27, 2009), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-ndash-responsibly-ending-war-iraq> (June 15, 2020).

<sup>156</sup> The White House, 'Remarks of president Barack Obama. Responsibly ending the war in Iraq.'

<sup>157</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>158</sup> Zwerdling, 'Obama cracks down on government contractors.'

<sup>159</sup> Heidi M. Peters, 'The Department of Defense's Use of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: Background, Analysis, and Options for Congress', *Congressional Research Service* (2011) pp.1-21, there

As mentioned earlier, from the second half of 2007 onward, the US government started to collect and provide more data regarding the use of contractors by the Department of State (DOD). However, these data provided by the DOD do not depict the whole picture as it pertains to the US government employing private contractors. Both the Department of State and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) have employed private contractors. In Moshe Schwartz's report to congress in 2011 he concluded that: 'as the military continues to withdraw from Iraq, the Department of State will assume greater responsibility for providing security and will have to hire more PSC personnel.'<sup>160</sup> In a similar report to Congress, Heidi Peters concluded: 'according to government officials, both DOD and the Department of State would be unable to execute their missions in Afghanistan and Iraq without the support of PSCs.'<sup>161</sup> This goes to show the important role PMSC's fulfill not only for the DOD, but also for the Department of State.

However, information regarding the employment of PMSC's by the Department of State and USAID is rarely made available and without much specifics. The difference in the availability of data between the DOD and the Department of State and USAID, derives from the fact that, in 2008, Congress instructed the DOD to start collecting data on private military contractors.<sup>162</sup> The Department of Defense and USAID do not fall under these regulations. With the data provided by the DOD, in quarterly reports (from 2010 onward) and reports, I have compiled two tables to help categorize and make sense of the data. They are presented below.

*Table 1: Department of Defense contractor levels (DOD), based on quarterly CENTCOM census reports from 2010 onward.*<sup>163</sup>

<b>FOURTH QUARTER OF EACH YEAR</b>	<b>TOTAL CONTRACTORS DOD</b>	<b>US CITIZENS</b>	<b>THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS</b>	<b>LOCAL/HOST COUNTRY NATIONALS</b>	<b>PSC (PRIVATE SECURITY CONTRACTOR) PERSONNEL</b>
<b>2010</b>	74.106	20.981	42.457	10.668	11.682
<b>2011</b>	52.637	16.054	29.213	7.370	9554
<b>2012</b>	9000	2314	4621	2065	2116
<b>2013</b>	6624	1626	2807	2191	2409
<b>2014</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>2015</b>	1403	1098	41	264	-
<b>2016</b>	2992	1823	737	432	-
<b>2017</b>	3592	2035	1067	490	-

<sup>160</sup> Moshe Schwartz, 'The Department of Defense's use of private security contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: background, analysis and options for Congress', *Congressional Research Service* (2011)pp. 1-23, there 12.

<sup>161</sup> Peters, 'The Department of Defense's Use of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq', 5.

<sup>162</sup> Ori Swed and Thomas Crosby, 'Who are the private contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan',

<sup>163</sup> [https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/CENTCOM\\_reports.html](https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/CENTCOM_reports.html) (main page for the quarterly census reports).

Table 2: Department of Defense contractor and troop levels in Iraq 2009-2017, based on 'Department of Defense contractor and troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007-2018' a report by the Congressional Research Service.<sup>164</sup>

<b>FOURTH QUARTER OF EACH YEAR, EXCEPT 2017 (FIRST QUARTER)</b>	<b>US ARMED FORCES</b>	<b>TOTAL CONTRAC TORS DOD</b>	<b>US NATIONAL CONTRACTORS</b>	<b>FOREIGN AND HOST COUNTRY NATIONAL CONTRACTORS</b>	<b>RATIO US ARMED FORCES TO CONTRACTOR PERSONNEL</b>
<b>2009</b>	129.200	113.731	29.944	83.787	1: 0.88
<b>2010</b>	48.410	74.106	20.981	53.125	1: 1.53
<b>2011</b>	44.755	52.637	16.054	36.583	1: 1.18
<b>2012</b>	-	9000	2314	6686	0: 9000
<b>2013</b>	-	6624	1626		0: 6624
<b>2014</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>2015</b>	3550	1403	1098	305	1: 0.40
<b>2016</b>	4087	2992	1392	1169	1: 0.73
<b>2017</b>	5262	3592	2035	1557	1: 0.68

As the tables show, from 2009 to 2011 we can see the number of total DOD contractors steadily drop, from 148.050 in the first quarter of 2009 to 52.637 in the last quarter of 2011. This decrease in contractors is in line with Obama’s promise to remove troops from Iraq. However, what is not in line with this promise is that at the beginning of 2012 there was still a significant contractor presence, namely 23.886. So even though there were no more US armed forces at the beginning of 2012, private contractors were now filling this void. The ratio of US armed forces to DOD Contractor personnel was consistently more than 1:1; in 2010 more than 1.5 times as much contractors as US troops. Another development that Schwartz and Swain notice in their report to congress, is that the number of contractors did not decrease uniformly across the contractor workforce. Since July 2008, base support and construction declined, whereas the contractors providing security actually increased by 14%.<sup>165</sup> On the basis of the period from 2009-2011 we can conclude that even though the number of contractors decreased significantly, the number of contractors relative to US armed forces actually increased and the number of private contractors providing security also increased.

The period from 2011-2014 saw contractors from the DOD decreasing with each year. However there was still a significant contractor presence as opposed to US armed forces, who had left. The reason may be that Obama tried to renegotiate the stay of US armed forces for a post-2011 troop presence. However, these negotiations failed.<sup>166</sup> The contractors were used to fill the vacuum left behind by the US armed forces and to help ease the transition. In 2014, CENTCOM didn’t release information on contractors in Iraq, indicating there were little DOD contractors. However, if one examines the *first* quarter of 2015, one can see that there were 250 DOD contractors in Iraq. Yet the report also states that around 5000 contractors are supporting US government operations. The contractor presence is thus much larger than the DOD data indicates.<sup>167</sup>

From 2015 to 2017 we see DOD contractors returning to Iraq due to the rise of the Islamic State. As a result of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, there would likely be little support for major US involvement and US boots on the ground. Metin Gurcan has

<sup>164</sup> Moshe Schwartz and Lawrence Kapp, 'Department of Defense contractor and troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan: 2007-2017', *Congressional Research Service* (2017) pp.1-12, there 8-11.

<sup>165</sup> Moshe Schwartz and Joyprada Swain, 'Department of Defense contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: background and analysis (2011) pp. 1-32, there 16.

<sup>167</sup> Josh Rogin, 'How the Obama administration bungled the Iraq withdrawal negotiations' (version October 21, 2011), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/21/how-the-obama-administration-bungled-the-iraq-withdrawal-negotiations/> (16 June, 2020).

argued that this provided opportunities for PMSC's, that could help conceal just how many people were actually fighting in this conflict.<sup>168</sup> This shows in the number of DOD contractors returning to Iraq, from 250 DOD contractors at the beginning of 2015, to 5262 contractors at the beginning of 2017. All these findings lead me to conclude that Obama's reliance on PMSC's did not decrease in comparison with the Bush presidency. The total number of contractors did decrease as a result of the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. However, the ratio of contractors to US armed forces actually increased. Contractors were used to extend the US stay in Iraq and the percentage of private contractors providing security increased. Once IS gained ground in Iraq, contractors were sent back to Iraq. As Zenko has stated: 'the president's 'light footprint' approach to war has relied on thousands of Americans paid to fight—and die—in the shadows.'<sup>169</sup> The only thing I would like to add to this is that most weren't American.

### **The consequences of relying on PMSC's for a neoliberal empire**

The (re)emergence of the private military sector has changed the options available to the US for the conduct of foreign policy.<sup>170</sup> The use of private security has further enhanced the US' ability to project military force.<sup>171</sup> The US can now wield power and exploit situations to its own advantage without at the same time exposing itself to accusations of neo-colonialism, or the use of power maximizing strategies that could lead to open conflict.<sup>172</sup> As Singer has argued, the private military industry has become the ultimate enabler, allowing operations to happen that would otherwise be politically impossible.<sup>173</sup>

These aren't the only consequences that come with this new form of power. The use of private contractors, especially armed, poses significant risks to US government interests. In his report to Congress Schwartz has concluded that the use of armed private security contractors can undermine efforts to win hearts and minds during counterinsurgency and other contingency operations.<sup>174</sup> Military commanders can directly control the actions of military personnel and government civilians. However, their control over individual contractor personnel is less direct. In a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report from August 2008 it says: 'The military commander generally lacks the authority either to increase the scope (dollar value) of the contract or to change the contractor's duties except in ways anticipated in the contract language.'<sup>175</sup> The military commander thus has less direct authority over the actions of contractor employees.

The private mission is often different from the overall public operation. Singer gives as example contractors on escort duty. They are going to be judged by their bosses on whether they achieve their mission of bringing their client from point A to B, and not on whether they 'win Iraqi hearts and minds along the way.'<sup>176</sup> Exeline Starr (a former Coalition Provisional Authority adviser) addresses the difference, in her experience, in travelling with a military escort and travelling with guards from Blackwater and DynCorp. While the soldiers kept her safe, they also did things as drinking tea and playing cards with local Iraqis. In contrast, the contractors told her: 'Our mission is to protect the principal at all cost, if that means pissing of the Iraqis, too bad.'<sup>177</sup> Due to their profit-driven nature, private military companies prioritized the provision of security to their

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<sup>168</sup> Metin Gurcan, 'Are military contractors heading back to Iraq?' (version September 15, 2014), <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/sites/almonitor/contents/articles/originals/2014/09/us-turkey-iraq-syria-isis-war-contractors-coalition.ac.html> (June 17, 2020).

<sup>169</sup> Zenko, 'Mercenaries are the silent majority of Obama's military.'

<sup>170</sup> Avant, *The Market for force. The consequences of privatizing security*, 258.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibidem*, 259.

<sup>172</sup> Marcus Mohlin, 'Merchants of security. Private security companies strategies and the quest for power', in: Joakim Berndtsson and Christopher Kinsey (eds.), *The Routledge research companion to security outsourcing* (New York 2016) pp.109-117, there 114.

<sup>173</sup> Singer, 'Can't win with them, can't go to war without them', 3.

<sup>174</sup> Schwartz, 'The Department of Defense's use of private security contractors in

<sup>175</sup> Congressional Budget Office. 'Contractors' support of US operations in Iraq.'

<sup>176</sup> Singer, 'Can't win with them, can't go to war without them', 6.

<sup>177</sup> Steve Fainaru, 'Where military rules don't apply. Blackwater's security force in Iraq given wide latitude by State Dept' (version September 20, 2007), <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-washington-post/20070920/281547991514891> (June 3, 2020).

clients, above the security concerns of other actors that inhabited their operating environment.<sup>178</sup>

Related to this, the Commission on Wartime Contracting concluded that 'military outsourcing can hurt US goals and objectives is by injuring innocent members of the local population or outraging their sensibilities. The can endanger the safety of military personnel or federal civilians, if the 'contractors' presence or performance creates unsafe conditions or invites attack.'<sup>179</sup> A prime example of this is the killing of seventeen Iraqi civilians by Blackwater personnel in Baghdad's Nisour square in 2007.<sup>180</sup> Meanwhile, the local population often does not distinguish between contractors and the US army. The local population then tends to blame the army for any unwelcome behavior perpetrated by contractors.<sup>181</sup> Another consequence of the US' use of private military companies is that it has led to waste and fraud. The Commission on Wartime Contracting (CWC) concludes that the use of private contractors has led to significant waste, around one of four dollars spent.<sup>182</sup> The CWC estimates that waste and fraud range from 31 billion dollar to 60 billion dollar.<sup>183</sup>

A whole other discussion to be had is the legal issues that come with the use of PMSC's and the legal framework surrounding them. PMSC personnel operating in Iraq was granted immunity from Iraqi law from 2004 to 2009, which means that its legal accountability was unclear. Only from January of 2009 onward did PMSC's become accountable under Iraqi law.<sup>184</sup> Another implication of the increased reliance on PMSC's is a reduction in transparency, especially as it pertains to decision making. Reliance on contractors can lead to policy decisions being removed from the public view as a result of confidentiality clauses regarding contracts.<sup>185</sup> Reliance on PMSC's can also erode accountability in the foreign policy sphere. As Nevers notes: 'Contracting enables governments to undertake tasks without public debate, because they need not explain to legislatures how contractors will be used in the way that they would if soldiers or diplomats were tasked to operate overseas. Governments can also deny responsibility for actions undertaken by private security actors, particularly if they go badly, although this is risky.'<sup>186</sup>

Last but not least, the use of contractors obscures the full human cost of war. The CWC states that 'the full cost includes all casualties, and to neglect contractor deaths hides the political risks of conducting overseas contingency operations. In particular, significant contractor deaths and injuries have largely remained uncounted and unpublicized by the US government and the media.'<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Scott Fitzsimmons, 'The market for force in the United States', in: Molly Dunigan and Ulrich Petersohn (eds.), *The markets for force: privatization of security across world regions* (Philadelphia 2015) pp. 144-161, there 159.

<sup>179</sup> See Commission on Wartime Contracting (CWC), "Transforming Wartime Contracting: Controlling Costs, Reducing Risks," Final Report, Washington, DC, August 2011, [www.wartimecontracting.gov/docs/CWC\\_FinalReport-lowres.pdf](http://www.wartimecontracting.gov/docs/CWC_FinalReport-lowres.pdf) pp.1-240, there 47.

<sup>180</sup> James Glanz and Alissa J. Rubin, 'From errand to fatal shot to hail of fire to 17 deaths' (version 3 October, 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/03/world/middleeast/03firefight.html?pagewanted=all> (31 May 2020).

<sup>181</sup> Dunigan, 'The consequences of outsourcing military support functions', 250.

<sup>182</sup> CWC, 'Transforming wartime contracting', 46.

<sup>183</sup> Ibidem, 68.

<sup>184</sup> Renée de Nevers, 'The effectiveness of self-regulation by the private military and security industry', *Journal of public policy* 30 (2010) 2, pp219-240, there 229.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, 173.

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, 173.

<sup>187</sup> Ibidem, 30.

### 3. US foreign policy marketing: neoliberal?

How was the US presence in Iraq marketed to the public under both the Bush and Obama presidency? Pieterse makes the argument that 'Neoliberal business is characterized by an inverse relationship between marketing and product, with more effort and quality going into marketing than the product. Customers are supposed to buy the marketing rather than the product.'<sup>188</sup> Marketing is an instrumental attribute to Pieterse's definition of neoliberal empire. Moreover, according to Pieterse, neoliberal marketing principles carry over into government operations.<sup>189</sup> Now, the Iraq war was carefully marketed as a 'blow for freedom' by the Bush administration.<sup>190</sup> Obama, however, had been opposed to the Iraq war from the beginning, labelling it a 'dumb' and 'rash' war.<sup>191</sup> The foreign policy marketing of US presence in Iraq could be fundamentally different, then, under the Obama presidency than under the Bush presidency. My focus will therefore lie on the differences and continuities between how the US presence in Iraq was marketed by both the Bush and Obama administration. I will also look at how U.S presence in Iraq fits into both administrations' grand strategies. I will first address the concept of marketing in the foreign policy sphere. After that, I will look at the Bush administration's foreign policy marketing efforts regarding Iraq and the place it took in his grand strategy. Finally, I will use the same analysis for the Obama presidency, which helps me pinpoint continuities and changes between both presidency's.

In order to trace the change and continuity in foreign policy produced during the Bush presidency and Obama presidency, I use National Security Strategies from both the Bush and Obama administrations. A National Security Strategy (NSS) is a document that is issued by the executive branch of the government for the US congress. The goal of a NSS is to be a comprehensive statement that articulates the US worldwide interests, objectives and goals regarding its security. One of the reporting requirements of a NSS is to detail the actions needed to deter aggression and the actions required for the implementation of the NSS.<sup>192</sup> It is an overarching statement describing how an administration sees all the pieces of foreign policy fitting together.<sup>193</sup> The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986 dictates that the president must submit a NSS annually. However in recent years these reports have often not been made.<sup>194</sup> Both the Bush and Obama administration have produced two National Security Strategies each. Bush produced one in 2002 and in 2006; Obama in 2010 and in 2015. Another important part of my analysis are speeches given by Bush and Obama that deal with US military presence in Iraq.

#### US foreign policy marketing

Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen argue that in order 'to garner public support for their foreign and security policies, state leaders need to market their policies to the public, the opposition, and their constituencies, allies, and adversaries.'<sup>195</sup> It is crucial for state leaders to market their policies to different constituencies, just as marketers promote their products to generate sales. Leaders can market war, peace and other foreign policy decisions.<sup>196</sup> Mintz and DeRouen divide the discipline of marketing into three subcategories. First and foremost there is the marketing of products and services to consumers and the *consumer relationship management* (CRM). Then you have *political marketing*, which focusses on the marketing of political candidates, political platforms and political parties. And lastly, you have *international relations marketing*, dealing with

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<sup>188</sup> Pieterse, 'Globalization or Empire?', 52.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, 51.

<sup>190</sup> Ibidem, 51,

<sup>191</sup> David Fitzgerald and David Ryan, *Obama, US foreign policy and the dilemmas of intervention* (London 2014) 27.

<sup>192</sup> Christopher Hemmer, 'Continuity and change in the Obama administration's National Security Strategy', *Comparative Strategy* 30 (2011) 3, pp. 268-277, there 268.

<sup>193</sup> Hemmer, 'Continuity and change in the Obama administration's National Security Strategy', 268.

<sup>194</sup> Congress, 'Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986' (October 24, 1985), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/3622> (July 15, 2020).

<sup>195</sup> Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen, *Understanding foreign policy decision making* (Cambridge 2010) 149.

<sup>196</sup> Mintz and DeRouen, *Understanding foreign policy decision making*, 149.

the marketing of foreign policy and national security policies, including war and peace.<sup>197</sup> My research regarding the marketing efforts by the Bush and Obama administration falls under the last subcategory.

One marketing strategy that is often used is framing. People's ideas and choices are affected not only by how a situation is described but also how it is framed.<sup>198</sup> Leaders attempt to impose or introduce and promote frames, which affect how the public perceives a particular situation.<sup>199</sup> Mintz and DeRouen illustrate this by using Bush's framing of the sides in the global war on terror. Bush declared: 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' He referred to conflict as one 'between good and evil' and 'us versus them', while also declaring: 'if anybody harbors a terrorist, they're a terrorist. If they fund a terrorist, they're terrorists. If they house terrorists, they're terrorists.'<sup>200</sup> One important role of the president of the US as a foreign policy marketer is setting an agenda and reference point for the public. The Bush administration did this by framing a new setting with the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which became the new national security narrative. Jeffrey Kubiak argues that this narrative constructed a world in which there were basically two kinds of actors: people who were civilized and loved freedom, and those who hated freedom. Against these 'forces of evil' the US would take the offense in pursuit of 'freedom.'<sup>201</sup> Kubiak argues that Bush's freedom agenda adopts the notion of the universality of US values, while also asserting that prosperity and power of the US are a direct offshoot of these values. If people were liberated from 'the evil of tyranny' they could enjoy the same freedom and prosperity as the US Bush famously stated in relation to this: 'the advance of freedom is the surest strategy to undermine the appeal of terror in our world. Where freedom takes hold, hatred gives way to hope.'<sup>202</sup>

Marketing and framing are feasible strategies to use in the foreign policy sphere, and then especially in crisis situations or ambiguous relations, because the public typically has limited knowledge and information regarding the crisis.<sup>203</sup> Leaders want to make decisions that are supported more than they are opposed.<sup>204</sup> With respect to this, Louis Klarevas argues that public opinion plays an important factor in the calculation of where, when, why and how to employ US armed forces abroad.<sup>205</sup> This is illustrated by the *National Security Strategy for a New Century*, from 1997, which stated: The United States cannot long sustain a fight without the support of the public.<sup>206</sup> Public opinion must be weighed when contemplating the use of force.

### **Bush's Iraq narrative**

Pieterse makes the argument that a regime change in Iraq came on the Bush administration's agenda soon after 9/11, 2001.<sup>207</sup> The marketing campaign however, only started seriously in September of 2002. Andrew Card jr., former White House chief of staff, explained why the rhetorical campaign on Iraq seemed to start quite suddenly in September of 2002: 'From a marketing point of view, you don't introduce new products in August.'<sup>208</sup> According to several White House officials, Bush's speech, on 9 September of 2002, one year after the 9/11 attacks, was meant to function as a centerpiece of a meticulously planned strategy in order to persuade the public of the need to take action

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<sup>197</sup> Ibidem, 149.

<sup>198</sup> Deborah Frisch, 'Reasons for framing effects', *Organizational behavior and human decision processes* 54 (1993) pp.399-429, there 399.

<sup>199</sup> Mintz and DeRouen, *Understanding foreign policy decision making*, 149.

<sup>200</sup> Jeffrey J. Kubiak, *War narratives and the American national will in war* (New York 2014) 113.

<sup>201</sup> Kubiak, *War narratives and the American national will in war*, 113.

<sup>202</sup> Ibidem, 113.

<sup>203</sup> Mintz and DeRouen, *Understanding foreign policy decision making*, 152.

<sup>204</sup> Ibidem, 166.

<sup>205</sup> Louis Klarevas, 'The 'essential domino' of military operations: American public opinion and the use of force', *International studies perspective* 3 (2002) 4, pp. 417-437, there 435.

<sup>206</sup> White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (1997) 9.

<sup>207</sup> Pieterse, 'Globalization or Empire?', 51.

<sup>208</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, 'Traces of terror: the strategy; Bush aides set strategy to sell policy on Iraq' (September 7, 2002), <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/07/us/traces-of-terror-the-strategy-bush-aides-set-strategy-to-sell-policy-on-iraq.html>.



against Iraq and the need to confront the threat from Saddam Hussein.<sup>209</sup> The speech on September 11, 2002, did not mention Iraq specifically. However the Global War on terror did play an important part. Bush used the speech to remind Americans of the greatness of its citizens and remind them of the dangerous enemy they fight: 'There is a line in our time and a time between the defenders of human liberty and those who seek to master the minds and souls of others. Our generation has now heard history's call, and we will answer it.'<sup>210</sup> The speech of September 11 was also intended to serve as an emotional precursor for a tougher speech on Iraq that he would give to the United Nations the following day.<sup>211</sup>

In the UN speech, Bush first speaks of the broader threat of terrorism, and the fact that this threat hides within many nations in the form of cells and camps. He then goes on to address his greatest fear, which is an outlaw regime providing terrorists 'with the technologies to kill on a massive scale.' He refers to Iraq as just such an outlaw regime: 'In one place— in one regime— we find all these dangers, in their most lethal and aggressive forms.'<sup>212</sup> He specifies the threat the regime of Saddam Hussein posed and the weapons of mass destruction that Iraq has supposedly been working towards. He concludes that 'the history, the logic, and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime's good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble. And this is a risk we must not take.'<sup>213</sup> In his address to the U.N. Bush also speaks on the plight of Iraqi citizens. 'If we fail to act in the face of danger, the people of Iraq will continue to live in brutal submission.' He concludes with tying the liberty of the Iraqi people to the security of all nations. 'Liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause, and a great strategic goal. The people of Iraq deserve it; the security of all nations requires it.'<sup>214</sup> Just a mere five days later the Bush administration would roll out its Nation Security Strategy, on September 17<sup>th</sup>.

## **2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) and US Grand Strategy**

'The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.'<sup>215</sup> This quote from Bush opens the National Security Strategy of September, 2002. A NSS usually consists of around 50 pages and projects the perceived position of US power and influence in the world at that moment in time. It also presents a general description of the most important threats to US national security, as well as providing the administration's policies and strategies to deal with these threats.<sup>216</sup> This makes it an important document in helping to determine the grand strategy of the US. Hemmer argues that is even so important that you can use grand strategy and national security strategy interchangeably in the case of the US.<sup>217</sup> Grand strategy is basically a 'state's theory how it can 'cause' security for itself.'<sup>218</sup> I will examine the national security strategies of Both Bush and Obama to help determine the role Iraq played in both administrations and the importance ascribed to Iraq as part of their foreign policy marketing.

The main trait that made the Bush NSS such a 'new and sweeping' security doctrine was the fact that the US asserted the right to use force again 'terrorists with a global reach' anywhere in the world. John Ikenberry sees it as the most systematic

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<sup>209</sup> Bumiller, 'Traces of terror: the strategy; Bush aides set strategy to sell policy on Iraq.'

<sup>210</sup> George W. Bush, 'Bush address to the nation on September 11 attacks' ( September 11, 2002), <https://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/09/11/ar911.bush.speech.transcript/index.html> (July 3, 2020).

<sup>211</sup> Bumiller, 'Traces of terror: the strategy; Bush aides set strategy to sell policy on Iraq.'

<sup>212</sup> George W. Bush, 'Address to the United Nations General Assembly' (September 12, 2002), <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html> (July 5, 2020).

<sup>213</sup> Bush, 'Address to the United Nations General Assembly.'

<sup>214</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>215</sup> White House, 'The national security strategy of the United States of America' (September 17, 2002), [nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2002/](http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2002/) (July 12, 2020).

<sup>216</sup> Mohammed Jamshidi and Farnaz Noori, 'The United States national security strategy under Bush and Obama: continuity and change', *World Sociopolitical studies* 1 (2017) 2, pp. 176-191, there 176.

<sup>217</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 3.

<sup>218</sup> Ibidem, 2.

statement of Bush strategic thinking. It articulated a vision of the US as unipolar state; one that was positioned above and beyond the institutions and rules of the global system and as a unipolar provider of global security and order.<sup>219</sup> The NSS of 2002 became one of the key documents of the Bush Doctrine. Although never formally articulated as such by Bush himself, it marked the foreign policy principles of the Bush administration. Robert Singh argues that the NSS of 2002 'represents as succinct and clear a statement of the Doctrine in its multifaceted dimensions as any US government publication that has sought to codify a broad foreign policy approach in a single document.'<sup>220</sup>

The Bush Doctrine consists of four key elements. The first assumes that the US is now the sole super power, which seeks to preserve this hegemonic position for the indefinite future.<sup>221</sup> This is illustrated by an quote in the NSS of 2002: 'we must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge.'<sup>222</sup> Further adding to this statement later on: 'Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.'<sup>223</sup> The second element of the Bush Doctrine entails the commitment to the use of preemptive military force if and when necessary. It is the most controversial element of the Bush Doctrine, due to its policy implications and has received most attention.<sup>224</sup> The Bush administration saw it as important to eliminate threats before fully materialized. The NSS of 2002 states: 'We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their clients before they are able threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States.'<sup>225</sup> The NSS identified terrorism as the main threat US national security: 'The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism — premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.'<sup>226</sup> This threat is assumed to originate from two sources. First, there are terrorist groups as al-Qaeda, which are assumed to originate in suppressed groups in weak states. Second, there are states seeking to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).<sup>227</sup> Iraq was seen as such a state. The NSS states that the US has irrefutable proof that Iraq's designs are not only limited to chemical weapons but also extend to 'to the acquisition of nuclear weapons and biological agents.'<sup>228</sup> The Bush administration sees the 'pursuit of, and global trade in such weapons' as a 'looming threat to all nations.'<sup>229</sup> Iraq is thus threatened as the example of a dangerous rogue state that is threatening the entire world.

The third element is a US unilateralism that is a logical consequence of the previous two elements. A commitment to the US as sole superpower and to a doctrine of preemptive strike is, as Schmidt and Williams put it, 'unilateralist to the core.'<sup>230</sup> This becomes evident in the Bush administration's national security strategy where it states: 'The United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.'<sup>231</sup> Here, the Bush administration essentially argues that they do not have the luxury of waiting for a potential multilateral solution given the nature and urgency of the threat. The willingness of the Bush administration to proceed unilaterally is perhaps no more clearly

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<sup>219</sup> John Ikenberry et al., *The crisis of American foreign policy. Wilsonianism in the twenty-first century* (New Jersey 2009) 7.

<sup>220</sup> Robert Singh, 'The Bush Doctrine', in: Mary Buckley and Robert Singh (eds), *The Bush Doctrine and the War on Terrorism: global responses and global consequences* (London 2006) 12.

<sup>221</sup> Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, 'The Bush doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', *security studies* 17 (2008) 2, pp. 191-220, there 195.

<sup>222</sup> White House, 'The national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>223</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>224</sup> Schmidt and Williams, 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', 197.

<sup>225</sup> White House, 'The national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>226</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>227</sup> Jamshidi, 'The United States national security strategy under Bush and Obama: continuity and change', 184.

<sup>228</sup> White House, 'The national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>230</sup> Schmidt and Williams, 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', 198.

<sup>231</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

demonstrated than in its invasion of Iraq. For the decision to invade Iraq the will of much of the international community, including the U.N. Security Council, was defied.<sup>232</sup> The fourth and last element, one which is deeply embedded in American foreign policy history, is democracy promotion. The Bush administration views American power as representing a force of democratization, which according to them is desired by all people and will get behind when they are given the opportunity to do so.<sup>233</sup> So, American foreign policy should actively be used, sometimes forcibly, to spread democracy. This assumes the universality of liberal values and, as mentioned earlier, 'a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise.' In the NSS it states: 'We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants.'<sup>234</sup>

As Richard Doyle argues, the NSS of 2006 is best viewed as an update of the 2002 NSS.<sup>235</sup> Both security strategies are premised on a critically important assumption regarding the role of the US in international security environment, which is stated directly in the NSS of 2006: 'America is at war. This is a wartime national security strategy.' This language is not found in any NSS before 2002.<sup>236</sup> As it pertains to Iraq however, there is one important difference between the two security documents, namely the fact that Iraq is mentioned a lot more in the 2006 Doctrine. When the document of 2002 came out, Iraq hadn't been invaded yet. However in March of 2006, the US had been in Iraq for three years. Together with Afghanistan, Iraq was treated as the front line in the War on Terror. Winning this war would require winning the battles in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to deny terrorists control of a nation, one that they could be used as a base and 'launching pad for terror.'<sup>237</sup> Interesting is that in the 2006 NSS the Bush administration acknowledges that prewar estimates of Iraqi stockpiles of WMD were wrong (which was the reason to start the war). It acknowledges its 'mistake.' The fact that the Bush administration felt compelled to do this is probably due to the growing criticism Bush and his administration received on the Iraq war and the continuing US presence in Iraq.

However, according to the Bush administration it was Saddam's reckless behavior that forced the US to act and that they have no doubt 'that the world is better off if tyrants know that they pursue WMD at their own peril.'<sup>238</sup> The Bush administration argues that the terrorists see Iraq as central in their fight against the US and that the terrorists believe that if they defeat the US in Iraq they will prove the US as a waning power and unreliable friend. This is why the NSS states: 'Surrendering to the terrorists would likewise hand them a powerful recruiting tool: the perception that they are the vanguard of history.'<sup>239</sup> In the NSS of 2006 the Bush administration acknowledges the challenges it has had, while arguing that since 2002, 'the world has seen extraordinary progress in the expansion of freedom, democracy, and human dignity.'<sup>240</sup>

### **Bush Doctrine as grand strategy**

The Bush grand strategy is one of American primacy and unilateralism. It is important to note though that an adherence to American primacy predates Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy. In 1992 Paul Wolfowitz drafted a grand strategy to 'prevent the emergence of a new rival.'<sup>241</sup> The document drafted by Wolfowitz, in short, advocated two things: an unchallenged American hegemony in the world and the use of preemptive military force to maintain this position.<sup>242</sup> This document was leaked to the press, which resulted in a fire-storm of criticism.<sup>243</sup> However, Hemmer argues that the 2002 NSS radically reprioritized the threats that the US was facing. Terrorists with access to

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<sup>232</sup> Schmidt and Williams, 'The Bush doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', 198.

<sup>233</sup> Ibidem, 196.

<sup>234</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America.'

<sup>235</sup> Richard Doyle, 'The US national security strategy: policy, process, problems', *public administration review* (2007) pp. 624-629, there 626.

<sup>236</sup> Doyle, 'The US national security strategy: policy, process, problems', 627.

<sup>237</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2006).

<sup>238</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>239</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>240</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>241</sup> Schmidt and Williams, 'The Bush doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', 195.

<sup>242</sup> Tyner, *The Business of war*, location 1407.

<sup>243</sup> Ibidem, location 1415.

weapons of mass destruction were now the most important threat, and as a result of this the US grand strategy had to be directed towards conducting a Global War on Terror.<sup>244</sup> 'The gravest danger our nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology.'<sup>245</sup> Terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction were singled out 'that eclipsed all other potential threats.'<sup>246</sup> Hemmer also argues that the new grand strategy advocated crusading for US values. Although, from an historical point of view, one may object to his use of the term 'crusading' but the point he's making concerns the 'civilizing' mission of the US, the values of which are not only triumphant but also offer the 'single sustainable model for national success.'<sup>247</sup> As it was stated by Bush: 'The United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to the corners of the world.'<sup>248</sup>

Not only did the Bush administration have confidence in the universality and efficacy of US values. It also believed that history was on America's side.<sup>249</sup> In the NSS of 2006 it states: 'The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the triumph of freedom over the threats of fascism and communism. Yet a new totalitarian ideology now threatens, an ideology grounded not in secular philosophy but in the perversion of a proud religion. Its content may be different from the ideologies of the last century, but its means are similar: intolerance, murder, terror, enslavement, and repression.'<sup>250</sup> In relation to this, the Bush administration argued that although history was on the side of America, time wasn't. That the US would be better off confronting potential threats sooner rather than later was central to its case for 'preemptive war.' In the light of the attacks of 9/11, Bush argued that it was better to act 'too early than waiting until it was too late.'<sup>251</sup>

### **Obama: 'Dumb War'**

Before I delve into Obama's rhetoric regarding US presence in Iraq, it is important to first look at Obama's earlier opinions regarding the Iraq war and how this helped him to become the nominee of the Democratic Party. Popular support for the Iraq War had decreased significantly during the Bush presidency. The monthly average of support for the war dropped from 73% in April of 2003 to 33% by the end of the Bush presidency five years later.<sup>252</sup> As Americans became more and more disenchanted with the war, they also soured on its architect. In the same time period, Bush's monthly approval ratings fell from 71% to 28%. As Bush and the war became increasingly unpopular, so did the Republican party. During the period from the first half of 2003 to the second half of 2008, the mean proportion of American rating the party favorably fell from 55% to 41%, while the Democratic Party favorability ratings grew from 52% to 55%.<sup>253</sup> Popular reaction had tilted the political field strongly in the Democrats favor.

In the race for becoming the nominee of the Democratic Party, Obama went up against the vastly more known and experienced Hillary Clinton. However Clinton had voted to authorize the war, whereas Obama had been opposed to it from the start. Clinton also represented continuity with the Democratic past, while Obama represented change, also the focal point of his campaign.<sup>254</sup> As early as October of 2002, more than one and half year before the actual invasion, Obama made his case against the Iraq War. In a speech given in Chicago Obama argued:

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<sup>244</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*,

<sup>245</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>246</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*,

<sup>247</sup> Ibidem,

<sup>248</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>249</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*,

<sup>250</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2006).

<sup>251</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 143.

<sup>252</sup> Jacobsen, 'George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the election of Barack Obama', 208.

<sup>253</sup> Ibidem, 208.

<sup>254</sup> Ibidem, 212.

What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war. What I am opposed to is the cynical attempt by Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz and other armchair, weekend warriors in this administration to shove their own ideological agendas down our throats, irrespective of the costs in lives lost and in hardship borne.<sup>255</sup>

Obama's Chicago speech, which would become an important part of his presidential campaign, made clear that he wasn't opposed to all wars. He was adamantly opposed to a war in Iraq, which would be 'a war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics.'<sup>256</sup> Obama saw the war in Iraq as a mistake, even before the US had invaded Iraq.

Over the years leading up to Obama's presidency, his view, as can be expected, would not become more favorable regarding the war. In an op-ed titled 'my plan for Iraq' leading up to presidential elections Obama stated:

I believed it was a grave mistake to allow ourselves to be distracted from the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban by invading a country that posed no imminent threat and had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks. Since then, more than 4,000 Americans have died and we have spent nearly \$1 trillion. Our military is overstretched. Yearly the threat we face from Afghanistan to Al Qaeda to Iran has grown.<sup>257</sup>

Obama's view regarding the Iraq war leading up to his presidency had consistently been one of opposition. This opposition served him well in his campaign for president. Jacobsen argues that 'the Iraq War was, through direct and indirect pathways, ultimately the single most contributor to Obama's presidential victory.'<sup>258</sup>

### **Obama's National Security Strategies**

When comparing the national security strategies from Obama's administrations with those of the Bush administrations, it is important to point out that new administrations never start from a blank slate. It is always possible to identify similarities and continuities between an administration and its predecessors. Hemmer argues that no US grand strategy will be completely novel.<sup>259</sup> Still, although this applies to all US presidents, Obama wasn't just inheriting a series of commitments, he was inheriting a relatively novel set of commitments.<sup>260</sup> Obama argued that he had 'to carefully find his spot between existing commitments.'<sup>261</sup>

Hemmer argues that Obama inherited a 'floundering economy, a bleak fiscal situation, a war on terror, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.'<sup>262</sup> This is exemplified by Obama's NSS of 2010, which started with a recognition of the weaknesses he had inherited. Where Bush spoke of 'unprecedented— and unequalled— strength and influence in the world.'<sup>263</sup> Obama argues that 'the burden of a young century cannot fall on American shoulders alone.' He also states: 'our strategy starts by recognizing that our strength and influence abroad begins with the steps we take at home. We must grow our economy and reduce our deficit.'<sup>264</sup> The strategy was focused on renewing American

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<sup>255</sup> Barack Obama, 'Senator Barack Obama's speech against the Iraq War' (October 2, 2002), <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99591469> (July 20, 2020).

<sup>256</sup> David Fitzgerald and David Ryan, *Obama, US foreign policy and the dilemmas of intervention* (London 2014).

<sup>257</sup> Barack Obama, 'My plan for Iraq' (July 14, 2008), <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/opinion/14obama.html> (July 20, 2020).

<sup>258</sup> Jacobsen, 'George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the election of Barack Obama', 208.

<sup>259</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 1.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibidem*, 151.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibidem*, 151.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibidem*, 151.

<sup>263</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2002).

<sup>264</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (May 1, 2010), [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf) (July 21, 2020).

leadership by building a stronger foundation for American leadership because, 'what takes place within our borders will determine our strength and influence beyond them.'<sup>265</sup>

Kaufman argues that in rhetoric Obama's NSS embraced his predecessors' goal of a freer world, but that it shunned moralistic verbiage.<sup>266</sup> The NSS of 2010 states: 'In all that we do, we will advocate for and advance the basic rights upon which our nation was founded, and which peoples of every race and religion have made their own. We promote these values by living them, including our commitment to the rule of law.'<sup>267</sup> This presents a stark contrast with the Bush administration's approach of US values as the single sustainable model for success, which had to be exported if necessary by force. The Obama administration argued for 'an international order advanced by US leadership.'<sup>268</sup> The quote also signifies a change in approach. Where the Bush administration chose to adopt an approach of unilateralism and American primacy, Obama opted for a more multilateral approach for his grand strategy. Obama argued that 'the problems we confront...can't be solved by just one country.'<sup>269</sup> Hemmer argues that part of what drove the Obama administration towards multilateralism was the realization of the limited resources of the US<sup>270</sup> In the 2010 NSS it states: 'our national security goals can only be reached if we make hard choices and work with international partners to share burdens.'<sup>271</sup> According to Hemmer, the Obama administration's focus on multilateralism presented the starkest distinction in Obama's foreign policy approach compared to Bush's foreign policy approach.<sup>272</sup> The NSS of 2010 did mention the *caveat* that 'the United States must reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary.'<sup>273</sup>

Another significant modification in Obama's US grand strategy was to downplay the centrality of the War on Terror. John Brennan, adviser on counterterrorism for the Obama administration, explains: 'the fight against terrorists and violent extremists has been returned to its right and proper place: no longer defining— indeed, distorting— our entire national security and foreign policy, but rather serving as a vital part of those larger policies.'<sup>274</sup> Obama also wanted to change the narrative of Bush's global War on Terror. In a memo sent out to staff members, at the beginning of his presidency, it notes: 'this administration prefers to avoid using the term 'Long War' or 'Global War on Terror.' Please use 'Overseas Contingency Operation.'<sup>275</sup> Afghanistan and Iraq were no longer linked together as one Global War on Terror. Obama now speaks of 'two wars' in which the US is involved.<sup>276</sup>

Obama rejected Bush's notion of rogue states and terrorist groups, which were used to justify the war in Iraq. Obama identifies a specific enemy. The NSS of 2010 states, 'this is not a global war against a tactic— terrorism or religion— Islam. We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa'ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support to attack the United States, our allies, and partners.'<sup>277</sup> The war is thus marketed different than under the Bush administration. However in practice little changed. Hemmer argues that the inclusion of al-Qa'ida 'affiliates' meant that this definition omitted few terrorist groups.<sup>278</sup> In relation to this, Gray argues that in substance there seems to be little change. She argues that Obama's approach 'looks like a continuation of Bush's policy

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<sup>265</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>266</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, 'U.S. national security from Bush to Obama. Continuity and change', in: Bahram M. Rajaei and Mark J. Miller (eds.), *National security under the Obama administration* (London 2012) pp. 11-28.

<sup>267</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>268</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>269</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>270</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 162.

<sup>271</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>272</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 161.

<sup>273</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>274</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 154.

<sup>275</sup> Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, 'Global War on Terror' is given new name' (March 25, 2009), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/24/AR2009032402818.html> (June 30, 2020).

<sup>276</sup> Adam Hodges, *The 'War on Terror' narrative* (New York 2011) 157.

<sup>277</sup> White House, 'The United States National Security Strategy for the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>278</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 154.

that the 'War on Terror' should be pursued by military means.<sup>279</sup> The NSS of 2010 states, 'For nearly a decade, our nation has been at war with a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.'<sup>280</sup> Obama accepted the Bush administration's notion that the growing destructiveness of modern weapons combined with a new type of enemy, forced the US to pursue a new set of foreign policy instruments.<sup>281</sup> Or, as Obama states: 'after 9/11, we knew that we had entered a new era – that enemies who did not abide by any law of war would present new challenges to our application of the law; that our government would need new tools to protect the American people, and that these tools would have to allow us to prevent attacks instead of simply prosecuting those who try to carry them out.'<sup>282</sup> Following from this, Obama is suspiciously quiet on the use of preemptive force. While the 2010 NSS does contain an NSS titled 'use of force', it does not mention the preemptive use of force. Warren and Bode argue that this suggests a silent continuation of Bush's preemptive use-of-force policy.<sup>283</sup> The 2015 NSS only mentions it once indirectly, where it states that the aim is to 'work to prevent, and if necessary, respond to mass atrocities.'<sup>284</sup> Hemmer argues that, although Obama saw the preventive war against Iraq as a mistake, the Obama administration remained convinced of the value of using direct force, such as drone strikes, against specific terrorist groups. He also didn't want to take the preventive war option off the table.<sup>285</sup>

One major difference in Obama's and Bush's foreign policy marketing is the importance attributed to Iraq in their grand strategy. Where Bush sees Iraq as central in the war against terrorism, Obama sees Afghanistan and Pakistan as the frontline of the fight against al-Qa'ida.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, Obama sees terrorism as one of the dangers the US faces instead of treating it, as the Bush administration did, as the decisive ideological struggle. Then, Obama wanted to move away from 'fighting costly, large scale ground wars.' In the NSS of 2015 it states, 'Six years ago, there were roughly 180,000 US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, there are fewer than 15,000. This transition has dramatically reduced US casualties and allows us to realign our forces and resources to meet an evolving set of threats while securing our strategic objectives.'<sup>287</sup> The Obama administration wanted to pursue a more sustainable approach that 'prioritizes counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats.'<sup>288</sup> Hemmer argues that Obama uses the language of America as a 'beacon' or 'light' as opposed to Bush's 'crusader' tone.<sup>289</sup> This suggests only difference. Yet, what are the continuities and differences, in the end?

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<sup>279</sup> Christine Gray, 'President Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy and international law on the use of force', *Chinese journal of international law* 10 (2011) 1, pp. 35-53, there 43.

<sup>280</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>281</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*, 154.

<sup>282</sup> New York Times, 'Obama's speech on national security' (May 21, 2009), <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/us/politics/21obama.text.html?auth=login-email&login=email> (July 22, 2020).

<sup>283</sup> Aiden Warren and Ingveid Bode, *Governing the use-of-force in international relations* (London 2014) 94.

<sup>284</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2015).

<sup>285</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum: recurring debates in US grand strategy*,

<sup>286</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2010).

<sup>287</sup> White House, 'The United States national security strategy of the United States of America' (2015).

<sup>288</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>289</sup> Hemmer, *American pendulum*, 165.

## 4. Conclusion

I set out to test Pieterse's notion of neoliberal empire by analyzing whether the concept holds up when examined from the perspective of the Obama presidency, by means of a case study. Pieterse saw a transition taking place, under the Bush presidency, from neoliberal globalization to neoliberal empire; from a system based on rules to a system based on (market) power. This new hybrid form of empire merged neoliberalism with empire. I've examined whether the continuation and divergence between the Bush and Obama presidency, from a privatization and marketing perspective, would suggest a continuation of the concept of neoliberal empire and thus show its viability.

Pieterse argues that the US' shift to combat mode in the wake of 9/11 facilitated an authoritarian concentration of power, silencing criticism under the widening umbrella of 'security'. Neoliberal practices now extended to security and war. In relation to this, I've found that under the Bush presidency private military contractors were used on a therefore unprecedented scale, providing the Bush administration with increased capacity and flexibility, without having to lose political capital, but also leading to less accountability and obscuring the full human cost of war. Under Obama the reliance on PMSC's in Iraq continued, and even though actual number of U.S troops decreased, Obama's reliance on PMSC's increased. So, the politics of military privatization continued under Obama. Under Bush and later Obama, PMSC's have profited of the Iraq war, while affecting foreign policy and obscuring the border between the government and private parties. This confirms Pieterse's notion of war as a matter of business in a neoliberal empire. The private military industry has become the ultimate enabler for U.S. presidents, allowing operations that might otherwise be politically impossible.

Under the Bush presidency Iraq was carefully marketed as a blow for freedom. Pieterse argues that neoliberal warfare comes with 'marketing campaigns worthy of corporate causes.' The Bush administration created a Global War on Terror narrative, in which the war in Iraq was framed as a crucial part. For Bush's grand strategy the Global War on Terror was its defining center. The Bush administration believed in an efficacy and universality of US values, which should be spread, by military means if necessary. Obama's narrative regarding Iraq was very different, labeling it as 'dumb war' before he became president. In Obama's grand strategy terrorism was regarded as just one of the security challenges the US faced. The Obama administration didn't want to speak of a Global War on Terror and didn't want to place Iraq in such a narrative. Obama also rejected the notion of rogue states and nations and identified al-Qa'ida as a specific enemy. The Obama administration emphasized a multilateral approach, where the Bush administration was marked by unilateralism. Still, continuity between the Bush and Obama presidency showed itself in the Obama administration's silence regarding the use of preemptive force policy, which suggests a continuation of Bush's use of force policy. The Obama administration also continued the war against terrorism by military means.

Under Obama US global military presence and power projection took a different form. Obama wanted to move away from large scale ground wars, in a desire to pursue a more sustainable approach of counterterrorism, using a different rhetoric but applying notions of the Bush doctrine, still, whilst making use of military outsourcing. How does this affect Pieterse's notion of neoliberal empire?

My research, although limited in that it only examines two characteristics of neoliberal empire, would suggest that, although Obama employed a different rhetoric and foreign policy marketing, he was either unwilling or unable to change policies from Bush's presidency. Obama didn't change the reliance on the private sector in the military sphere and stayed quiet on the use of preemptive military force, which placed the US outside international law. A system for American exceptionalism was put in place under the Bush administration. This may have taken a different shape under Obama but underlying continuities remain, suggesting a different packaging for neoliberal empire. In other words neoliberal empire is marketed differently, but its contents remain.



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