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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Literature review .....	5
Methodology.....	7
<i>Research design</i> .....	7
<i>Mouritzen and Wivel's model</i> .....	7
<i>Philosophy of science</i> .....	9
<i>Methods</i> .....	9
<i>Limitations</i> .....	9
<i>Flow of argument</i> .....	10
Theory.....	10
<i>The systemic level</i> .....	10
<i>The interstate level</i> .....	12
<i>The intrastate level</i> .....	13
Background to the US intervention in Iraq .....	15
Analysis .....	17
<i>The systemic level</i> .....	18
<i>The interstate level</i> .....	24
<i>The intrastate level</i> .....	29
The Israel Lobby .....	29
The neoconservatives .....	32
Discussion .....	42
Conclusion.....	44
References .....	46

## Abstract

The focus of the present thesis is the decision of the United States to intervene in Iraq. More precisely the specific focus is on investigating why the US chose to intervene militarily instead of choosing a different foreign policy. This is of particular importance to the author because the war had many negative consequences on the Iraqi and American population, economy, stability and security but also for the world at large, by increasing international insecurity and indirectly encouraging terrorism. Many scholars already showed that the initially invoked reasons that justified the intervention were illegitimate.

As it is such a complex topic, we considered that the complementary approach developed by Mouritzen and Wivel was the appropriate tool to deal with the large amount of data to ensure we evaluate the influences the US faced at different levels. The model is a framework of foreign policy analysis taking into account influences states face at the system level, as a consequence of their position in the international system, the geopolitical considerations states face in their immediate environment and the intrastate specific peculiarities different for each state. Hence, the model was considered to serve as a framework for analysis and focus on the consumption of theory.

In order to get a closer insight into US's foreign policy in Iraq and provide an answer to its aggressive foreign policy choice we started by conducting a literature review of the already existing literature on the topic to evaluate the different angles of the subject. The literature review allowed us to get an overview of the research already done on the topic and to point to what the thesis can contribute with. Subsequently, the model of foreign policy analysis together with the theories pertaining at each level were presented to get an overview of the theoretical basis for the thesis. Furthermore, the analysis of the case in question was conducted by applying the model and the theories to the empirical data. Lastly, the research question was answered and the findings were discussed together with the limitations of the thesis as well as the contribution it brings to the present pool of literature.

## Introduction

The American-led intervention in Iraq was one of the most disputed and controversial topics in international politics. Many disputed the legality of the war, while the United States strongly advocated for the intervention. The reasons behind the decision to intervene and the implications for the international community were a major focus of tension for many years. The intervention in Iraq was thought to have led the country in civil war, the spread of terrorism in the Middle East, and provide a strong recruitment pool for Al-Qaeda (Byman, 2007). Why then did the US choose to intervene in Iraq?

The paper analyses US's foreign policy strategy in Iraq and through the approach of foreign policy analysis developed by Hans Mouritzen and Anders Wivel, the author intends to shed light over the rationale behind the invasion. The paper intends to answer the following research question: *Why did the United States invade Iraq?*

The topic is of major importance because today's globalized political world emphasizes the importance of international relations. Foreign policies then are states external behaviour towards the other nation states existing in the international system (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 19). However, in order to build strong, sound foreign policies we have to analyse previous ones, understand them and thus build more just and effective ones in the future.

US's foreign policy in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was characterized by interventions in the Middle East. According to the Oxford Bibliographies, foreign intervention represents the *"interference in the territory or domestic affairs of another state with military force, typically in a way that compromises a sovereign government's control over its own territory and population"* (Silverstone, 2011). The author considers Iraq to have withstood a foreign intervention when the US intervened militarily in Iraq, disregarding the state's sovereignty and disapproval of the deployment of troops.

The intervention had many severe consequences which makes it important to understand. It represented the most violent war for the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the highest number of troops involved military in another country: between 100,000 and 150,000 in the period of 2003 and 2009, with the peak during the surge, in 2007, when an additional 30,000 troops were deployed to Baghdad. 4,421 service personnel were killed and 32,000 wounded between 2003 and 2011 (BBC News, 2011). The war also played a significant role in shaping the world's image of US's role in the world (New York Times, 2013). Furthermore, between 2003 and

2011, 461,000 Iraqis died and by 2015 4,4 million were internally displaced while 264,000 were refugees abroad (Huffington Post, 2003; Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2016). The war also led to the emergence of ISIS, which according to President Obama was “*a direct outgrowth of Al Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of the invasion*” (Foreign Policy Journal, 2015).

The author of the paper takes interest in explaining US’s decision to intervene in Iraq as there is currently no consensus in explaining the intervention, despite the severe consequences for the Iraqi and American population, but also for the world at large.

## Literature review

In the following chapter, the relevant literature will be examined to get an overview of how other scholars scrutinised US’s decision to invade Iraq. The purpose of the literature review is to give us an overview of what is already known on the topic, how other researchers explained US’s decision and equally important what are the tools, models and theories they employed. Also, it helps us place the present research in the context of already existing literature and allows us to emphasize what the present paper can contribute with (Lamont, 2015).

The academic debate around the topic is abundant as many scholars concerned themselves with explaining the decision to intervene in Iraq. Daniel Lieberfeld presented the decision to intervene as reflected by different theoretical perspectives: realism, liberalism, elite interests, ideological influences, and personal and social psychology. Realism described the decision as part of US’s strategy to maintain hegemony through the use of force and to ensure security from terrorism (the Al-Qaeda-Iraq - 9/11 link) and Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. According to liberalism, US intervened in Iraq to liberate its people and build democracy. The elite interest theory claimed that it is the elites that drove the US to war due to the different agendas of various interest groups, such as the weapons, construction and oil corporations but also the defence and intelligence agencies. Ideological influences suggested that the neoconservative belief in the need to eliminate any potential threats, the vengeful US nationalism after 9/11 together with the belief of primitivism and inferiority towards Middle Eastern people took the US to war. Lastly, personality and social psychology described US’s decision as a response to a deep psychological need to find an “evildoer” and someone to punish for the events of 9/11, as a way of getting back to Saddam Hussein after trying to assassinate Senior Bush earlier in Kuwait or as a way of showing the difference in policy decision making

between President Bush and his father and his reluctance to overthrow Saddam Hussein after the 1991 Gulf War (Lieberfeld, 2005).

Two of the most prominent realists, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt argued that US's decision to intervene in Iraq was to a large extent due to the strong Israel lobby and their interference in American politics. Basically what they claimed is that the security reasons, energy interests in Iraq or any other lobbyists played a relatively small role in US's decision. Rather, due to Israel's security concerns in region and the strong withhold the Israeli lobbyists have on the American presidential candidates and the US Congress were a decisive factor that compelled the US to go to war (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007).

Cramer and Thrall on the other hand, asserted that the answer to this puzzle can be found in the ideology shared by Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld and President Bush. The three believed in US's supremacy and oil was one way of ensuring that supremacy. The top leaders approved of advancing US's hegemony through assertive military action in particular in this geopolitically important oil-rich region (Cramer and Thrall, 2012).

Summarizing, scholars explain differently US's decision to intervene in Iraq and although the academic debate around the topic is abundant, there is still no consensus in explaining the intervention. We believe the major limitation of the theoretical literature on the topic refers to theory application that is either applying a single theory to the case of Iraq or conducting a comparative study to explore whether a theory can provide a better understanding than another. This is where we believe the model developed by Mouritzen and Wivel can provide a more insightful understanding of the situation. The model assumes that analysis does not necessarily include an either or choice of theory, but rather considers that insights pertaining to different theories can be combined in order to get a more realistic understanding of foreign policy choice. In essence, we consider this complementary approach will help grasp more adequately the particularities of the case and that it is a more appropriate approach than having applied only one specific theory or having taken the comparative study approach. As the literature review also showed there are many angles when explaining US's foreign policy choice in Iraq and the three level approach is unique in that it allows for perspectives to supplement each other for explanatory purposes (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 5). Hence, we consider the present paper can add valuable input to the pool of literature by using the model developed by Mouritzen and Wivel.

## Methodology

### *Research design*

The author seeks to answer the following research question by employing the approach developed by Mouritzen and Wivel: *Why did the United States invade Iraq?* In this case the research question is empirical in nature, as it seeks to investigate a “how” based question and explain a phenomenon (Lamont, 2015). In order to answer the question, a case study research design was considered. This corresponds to the present scope as our interest lies in the specific case of Iraq and not in generalizing the findings to other cases or wars the US engaged in the Middle East.

We employ the deductive approach, which means we start with a theory and a model in this case and attempt to test whether it can explain a particular case (Kuada, 2012). Basically, we test the model developed by the two authors and explore whether or to what extent can it explain the puzzle in question, that is, the decision made by the US to intervene in Iraq. The limitation of this approach is that the researcher starts with a theoretical framework in mind and might overlook aspects of the unique case in question. Nevertheless, this approach was favoured over the inductive approach due to the time and resources constraints.

### *Mouritzen and Wivel's model*

The model proposed by Mouritzen and Wivel seeks to explain foreign policy by an analysis at three levels: the system, interstate and intrastate level. The system level implies that all states are similar units existing in an anarchic system, in which they have as a scope survival and they seek to achieve that by balancing the power of a potential assertive state. The interstate level refers to geopolitics and geoeconomics and it recognizes space, positioning and proximate balancing as decisive in dictating a state's foreign policy decision. Lastly, the intrastate level refers to the decision making process and the different interest groups that influence the process of making foreign policy and it assumes that states and governments represent one unitary actor (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 24-25).

The model is based on the principle of parsimony, that is, a simple explanation that can explain “much by little” is preferred. Therefore, it is only in case the system or the abstract level does not provide an explanation alone that we move down the explanatory ladder exploring the interstate characteristics and if necessary the specific intrastate level. This is in line with the principle of parsimony which entails a “stepwise abandoning of simplifying assumptions”. Understandably, as we proceed down the explanatory ladder, we acknowledge that we have to

be critical in regards to the theoretical parsimony lost in relation to the gained explanatory power and only allow for losing parsimony in case of significant added explanatory understanding (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 6).

In order to clarify the approach, the authors emphasize that the analysis should not result in either or level explaining a specific foreign policy. Rather to secure the simplicity of the argument the authors use a ladder-like approach starting from the top level, the system level and if needed going down the ladder investigating intrastate peculiarities. Thus, the usage of three different levels should not lead to three different answers, but rather to arguments that either push each other in which case the resulting foreign policy decision would represent a compromise between the different explanations pertaining at different levels. Basically, in case there are contradictions between the three levels, we expect the resulting foreign policy to represent a “middle way” or a compromise between what we expect from states according to each level. Or that the different levels would supplement each other in providing a strong and comprehensive argument pointing to the same idea. Nevertheless, it can be that sometimes the system level provides a legitimate explanation alone (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 5-6).

In order to safeguard the lack of repetition, as the researcher advances down the explanatory ladder (only if the system level cannot provide an explanation alone), the interstate and intrastate level should address only the explanatory gap that still needs explanation. In this way avoiding to explain a phenomenon through different lenses but rather seeking to add an explanation to the missing link (Mouritzen, 2017: 637).

The difference with this methodological approach is that it seeks to combine different ideas provided by different theories to gain a more integrative insight in particular cases. It is important to emphasize that the complementary approach here refers to the *consumption of theory* rather than to the part of *theory formation*. Mouritzen and Wivel then try to combine explanations pertaining to theories with different roots. According to the authors the explanations have to be made compatible by the researcher in a conscious way. This means that combining different perspectives can either result in a compromise between conflicting perspectives or that the different explanations complement and reinforce each other in a compelling argument (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 4-6).

The strength of the approach lies in it overcoming the limitation that comes with using a single theory in explaining phenomena or what the authors call “*the existing tendency towards compartmentalization of research communities along incompatible theoretical lines*”



(Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 5). Generally, while it can be argued that one theory is better than another in explaining a case, it is rarely that one theory alone can account for all the particularities of a specific case (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 4). However, it is not assumed here that due to the complementary aspect of this model, we will be able to explain all the particularities of the present case, rather that we might be able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the case.

### *Philosophy of science*

The ontology and epistemology as reflected in the present thesis will be further presented. These are important to understand as the stances assumed by the researcher influence the way research is conducted, the methodology employed and thus the results reached. For instance level combination in explaining foreign policy stems from the epistemological stance of realism. This implies that reality is viewed as something independent of theoretical models, which allows for levels to be combined (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 27). Furthermore, the ontological paradigm is that of objective reality which indicates that reality is seen as something objective and tangible and not varying with individual perception (Kuada, 2012).

### *Methods*

The researcher chose to employ a qualitative approach and use empirical data to answer the research question. Basically, archival and document based research in form of primary and secondary data were consulted. Primary data were reviewed in form of speeches or press releases by President George W. Bush and his administration or other directly involved actors in the process of foreign policy making, explaining the reasons for the intervention (Lamont, 2015).

Secondary data were further investigated. This normally provides a more nuanced and unbiased understanding of a situation, as researchers tend to have fewer interests and hidden agendas than politicians, governments and interest groups when presenting facts. Hence, articles published by researchers in peer-reviewed journals were deemed to be more bias-free compared to governmental data. Furthermore, several media outlets such as the Guardian, the New York Times, Al-Jazeera, TIME Magazine and so forth, were consulted (Lamont, 2015).

### *Limitations*

One common limitation in using secondary data refers to the potential interpretability of the primary data. Nevertheless, using secondary data allowed for a more comprehensive and

nuanced understanding of the topic. Moreover, it is highly accessible for students of international relations through search engines such as the Aalborg University Library or SAGA. Nonetheless, interviews with key persons from the American administration might have added extra value to the present thesis.

### *Flow of argument*

The paper will continue presenting the three level model and the theories or approaches that correspond to each level. Thereafter, an analysis of the case in question will follow, where the model will be applied to explain US's foreign policy choice in Iraq. Lastly, the author will discuss the findings and end by answering the research question.

## Theory

In the next sub-chapters, the theories or approaches pertaining at each level (the system, interstate and intrastate level) in Mouritzen and Wivel's model will be presented. It is worth emphasizing that the model doesn't prescribe which theories should be employed at every level, but rather it tries to provide a framework for the consumption of theory. Nor does it imply that a review of what theories can best explain each level was undertaken (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 29). However, we chose to use the model together with the exact theories or approaches pertaining at each level as developed in the book *"Explaining foreign policy- International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War"* as we found them suited to our case because they highlight important aspects to consider when explaining US's decision to interfere in Iraq. Below we will continue with presenting the theoretical framework of the thesis which will later form the framework for the analysis of the case study.

### *The systemic level*

The theoretical starting point at the system level is structural realism. According to structural realism, foreign policy represents a response to the anarchic system and the relative systemic power. Basically the decisions made by states in form of foreign policy strategies are considered to be a direct response to the anarchic system and the power distribution of states within the international system. The international anarchic system means that all states within the system are similar units, however there is no higher authority that has a monopoly over violence and so nothing can prevent states from threatening or using violence in relation to each other (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 29).

From the premise of anarchy, three ideas stem that explain foreign policy at this level. First, as there is no higher authority that can protect states, they have to protect themselves against any potential threats and ensure they own survival and security. Hence, states have to be active in their defence as they cannot appeal to any entity if international rules were to be violated. Second, as all states are responsible for their own security, they are in constant evaluation of one's state relative power versus the others'. A state's power in relation to another's is important as it is this that determines a state's capacity to pursue both defensive and offensive aims. Defensive aims refer to a state's goal to protect itself and respond to any threats directed at itself and its autonomy, while offensive aims refer to a state's capacity to influence other states and their actions or policies. As no higher authority can prevent states from dictating terms to other states, they can only ensure their security by making relative power calculations vis-à-vis other nations. Hence, foreign policies are dictated to a high degree by power calculations in relation to other states. Third, as a consequence of striving to increase their relative power within the international system, states tend to seek to balance power vis-à-vis the other states in the anarchic system (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 29-30).

Structural realism at its core is a theory of power balancing and it is this premise that affects how states act and what they consider when deciding their foreign policies. As a consequence of the anarchic system, states are constantly trying to balance the power of the other states by increasing their internal power capabilities by means of an increased spending on military or external power building capacities in form of building alliances. Furthermore, whenever states consider their strategic options, they always take into account the costs and benefits of various strategies and will employ those that make sense and can provide the best outcome considering the costs. Hence, states can choose to balance power by employing hard (military armament and building alliances) or soft (diplomatic and institutional politics) strategies or a combination of the two (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 31).

The distribution of power across the international system has implications for power balancing in a unipolar world, which we consider to be the case with the US being the hegemon. On the one hand, states will constantly seek to balance the unipole, while the unipole will try to keep the balance of power to its benefit. As this thesis concerns itself with analysing US's behaviour, we will continue by presenting only the implications related to the hegemon. Basically, the unipole's strategy to keep the balance to its favour, can be achieved through three methods. Firstly, it offers security to those states that support the unipolar world and insecurity to those states that seek to alter the balance of power. Secondly, it offers economic incentives to states

in order to keep them in check from balancing. Lastly, it institutionalizes a set of rules and norms in various organizations that are often in accordance with the unipole's personal interests and which often provide the means to "freeze" power distributions in the international system. Two such organizations are the United Nations and NATO which promote values such as human rights and horizontal non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the equality between states and reduction of sphere of influences and power concentrations. Intervention in other states affairs is authorized if it can be shown that the norms on which the world order is based, were violated. Thus, interventions are not because of national interests of the hegemon, but because it is "right" to upkeep with the universal rules and any violation of that is a violation of the contemporary free world (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 32-33).

### *The interstate level*

The interstate level refers to the salient stable environment in which states, which we consider non-mobile units, exist. Basically this level refers to the fact that states are primarily concerned and faced with their immediate environment and their actions come as a result of proximate power calculations, rather than the international system as a whole. According to the interstate level, when explaining a state's external behaviour we should look at the challenges coming from its immediate environment rather than at the pressure equating from the distribution of power in the international system or a state's position in the system (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 34).

As states are non-mobile units, they are constantly in a certain fixed unchangeable geographic environment, surrounded by permanent neighbours. This means that states have to adapt to this situation and the politics in their surrounding area with their neighbouring units. This is a characteristic each state faces in an unchangeable way and it normally seeks to find an appropriate way of managing this environment. The fact that states are non-mobile units and thus face the same stable geographic environment, emphasizes the need for a spatial emphasis and an explanatory level at this level and that is why it important to account for the interstate level when trying to explain a state's behaviour. The attribute of non-mobility and the fact that each state faces a different geographical environment highlights the need for a different level of explanation than that of the international system and the domestic level- a level exploring each state's salient environment and the particular challenges arising from that particular immediate geographic environment. Thus, there is a need for separation in explanatory levels and the challenges that arise at different levels and the interstate level focuses on explaining a

state's behaviour based on its surroundings rather than its structural or internal unit attributes (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 33-36).

In international politics, a state's power and incentives decrease with distance, hence a state's interest and power projections may be higher in its situational environment than at great distance. This implies that a state will mostly be concerned with this immediate environment. Evidently, in case we refer to states which can be considered great powers, or the hegemon, in this case the US, then immediate environment refers to its global sphere of influence rather than the geographically nearest region. That is why in the case of great powers, proximate power balancing is often regarded to be tantamount to systemic balancing (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 34-38).

The interstate level explains that when trying to understand a state's behaviour, we should look at its environment rather than at the pressure equating from the distribution of power within the international system. The interstate level then prescribes that there is an explanatory level between the system and the unit level, and that each state faces a different and unique environment. (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 34-38).

According to the perspective described at this level, states will seek to balance proximate power or sphere of influence (for great powers like the US) if (1) it is relevant, that is, the state is situated near the power asserter or it concerns a state's sphere of influence; (2) it is possible- the state can employ its internal and external power capabilities and these are free to be operated; (3) it is realistic, that is, the costs incurred are assumed to be less than the benefits and that the state disposes of sufficient power capabilities to deal with the power asserter. Only if these conditions can be fulfilled, can we expect a state to choose the strategy of balancing. In a contrary case, we would expect a state to choose a different strategy- either indifference or bandwagon with the power asserter (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 37-38).

### *The intrastate level*

The intrastate level points to the domestic level of foreign policy making. More precisely, it assumes that a state's behaviour can be explained by looking at the actors that produce foreign policy, their goals and intentions and the foreign policy decision making process. Structural realism tells us what pressures we expect nation-states to face as a consequence of being part of the international system. The internal, domestic dimension however, explains us how they will react to these pressures considering their internal peculiarities. The level also points to the

importance of interest groups, opinions, political parties and bureaucracies and how these influence decision makers (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 25, 39- 40).

According to the Luxury Theory developed by Mouritzen and Wivel, intrastate factors are more likely to play a decisive role in foreign policy making depending on a state's external action space. A state's external action space represents its capacity to stay unaltered by other states' influence or power. This is what permits or prohibits intrastate factors to play a role in the decision making process. Basically, this would constitute a luxury. A state's external action space decreases in case of external danger which does not permit the luxury of internal factors to play a significant role in the foreign policy choice. Contrary, a favourable external space allows intrastate peculiarities to play a decisive role. To further elaborate, in case external requirements conflict with a state's goals, then we expect foreign policy to be rather standardized, without internal factors playing a significant role. Also, in case external danger is relatively grave, then we expect cohesion nationally and that various internal interests disappear again leaving no action space for domestic factors to be decisive. In these two cases, we expect internal elements to play an insignificant role (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012:41-42).

The theory considers that the role of the intrastate factors represent a luxury and that the specific peculiarities represent a state's deviation from normal. Furthermore, the theory prescribes four scenarios as following. When there is a strong external pressure for example an international crisis and no particular domestic factors, the external environment is decisive. Secondly, in case external pressure is too weak to generate a policy outcome then intrastate peculiarities have more action space and represent the trigger. Evidently, there are no external factors that restrain domestic peculiarities. Thirdly, there can be contradictory influences, more precisely, it can either be that intrastate factors restrain the external ones, or that they reinforce each other (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012:42-44).

Among the intra-forces relevant to the case of Iraq two stand out: the role of the neoconservatives and the role of the Israel lobby. We seek to investigate the argument according to which the Israeli lobby was one of the main elements that led the US to war in Iraq and we do so by analysing whether the Israel lobby was effective enough to influence US foreign policy through the criteria developed by Smith. According to the US law, a lobbyist represents "an individual or organization whose job is to influence the passing or defeat of legislation and who receives money for that purpose" (Terry, 2005: 29). According to Smith interest groups, including the ethnic ones, exert influence on policy makers by three means: 1)

they provide considerable number of votes in important areas and thus politicians tend to be sensitive to their concerns as they want to earn their vote; 2) they are able to provide significant political contributions to campaigns and have influence over those politicians that gain elections and can support those politicians that promote their goals and interests; 3) they have a strong organizational body that can establish strategies to get the legislation preferred passed, is able to create connections with other social forces to promote common goals, observes the decision making process and sanctions opponents while prizing supporters of the interest group (Smith, 2000:94).

## Background to the US intervention in Iraq

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait which led to the outbreak of the First Persian Gulf War. In response, US-led troops were deployed to Kuwait with the scope of pushing Iraqi troops out of the country. The war ended in 1991 when the US-led coalition succeeded to force Iraqi forces to withdraw. Despite popular uprisings President Saddam Hussein remained in power and later on the regime was subjected to a weapons inspection programme. In 1998, to restrain Iraq's aggression, British and American forces carried out several airstrikes in order to destroy Iraq's weapons programmes (BBC News, 2017).

Subsequently, according to the US, Saddam Hussein's regime became an even greater threat to international security which led to the decision to intervene militarily and overthrow the government. March 2003 marked the beginning of the US intervention in Iraq with the scope *"to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger"* (TIME Magazine, 2010). President Bush then authorized the deployment of troops on the ground and the beginning of airstrikes in Bagdad against "targets of opportunity". In the same month, US troops succeeded to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government and one month later they managed to take control of Baghdad facing little opposition. (TIME Magazine, 2010). However, in the midst of transfer of power, violence and lawlessness erupted, with President Bush diminishing the importance of this fact (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

In May 2003, an official end to the major combat between Iraqi and American troops was announced by the American President. By the end of September, The Washington Times gained access to a secret report which pointed to a poor preparation of the reconstruction phase after occupying Iraq and to the fact that President Bush agreed on the strategy on Iraq in August 2002 already (TIME Magazine, 2010). Also, Osama bin Laden appeared in a video released by

Al-Jazeera denouncing US's intervention and Bush's quest for oil and encouraged Iraqis to not accept a government installed by the US as it will only "be a puppet and traitorous regime" (TIME Magazine, 2010). At the end of the year, Saddam Hussein was captured. As a consequence of the fall of Saddam Hussein's Baathist party, violence and looting only got worse; criminals targeted governmental buildings and reservoirs and armed groups sought to fight each other and the foreign occupation. The US now struggled to establish law and order in a state where insurgency intensified and civil war was considered to have erupted (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017).

The period between August 2003 and June 2004 was characterized by the escalation of violence and insurgency. In February 2004, Sunnis started to inflict violence on Shiites and Americans and one month later the worst attack, since Saddam Hussein was removed from power took place, killing 180 Shiites (TIME Magazine, 2010). In April 2004, controversial pictures from Abu Ghraib were made public, displaying torturing treatment applied by US soldiers on Iraqi prisoners, drawing attention to the paradox of the war that was intended to bring freedom to Iraqis. Also, it sparked revolt in the Middle East against the American occupation. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda conducted several attacks against American contractors and businessmen (TIME Magazine, 2010).

In July 2004, the 9/11 Commission finished its report and declared publicly that there were no official links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda and the attacks from 9/11 (TIME Magazine, 2010). In September, a major battle took place in Fallujah, where American and Iraqi forces attacked an insurgent bulwark. While the US-led troops were successful in their battle, many civilians were killed in the process, according to Red Cross (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

In January 2005, the first democratic elections in fifty years were organized in Iraq. The United Iraqi Alliance, a Shi'a coalition became the majority in parliament. Furthermore, 122 were killed and more wounded in an attack that indicated the beginning of the violence targeted at US troops and those that collaborate with them (TIME Magazine, 2010). As the second anniversary of the toppling of Saddam Hussein took place, many Iraqi took to the streets and stressed the need for a withdrawal plan of the American troops, as there were a general desire of freedom from dictators and the foreign occupation. At a general level, there was still a lot of sectarian violence and many groups fighting each other especially between the Shi'as and Sunnis (who were not represented in the government), as the US and the newly appointed government and its security forces were not able to establish law and security.



The subsequent period was seen as one of political advancement, despite continuous sectarian violence. After the elections in which 8 million Iraqis participated, a draft constitution was agreed upon and endorsed by Shiite and Kurdish representatives, but not by Sunnis. In October a final version of the constitution was made public intended to make Iraq an Islamic federal democracy. At the end of 2005, Iraqis decided on a full-term government and parliament and in April, Nuri Kamal, the first leader of the full term government since Saddam Hussein was toppled, was appointed (New York Times, 2013).

In December 2006, Saddam Hussein was executed “for crimes against humanity” (BBC News, 2017). In January 2007, President Bush decided on the deployment of 20,000 more troops with the scope of improving security in Bagdad and putting an end to sectarian violence (TIME Magazine, 2010). However, bombings, suicide bombers and car bombs remained the normality in the daily lives of Iraqis. Politically, Shi’a and Kurdish representatives continued to strengthen their alliance and support the prime minister, without bringing Sunni representatives on board (BBC News, 2017).

In November 2008, the first agreement regarding the withdrawal of US troops was presented: by summer 2009 most troops were to pull out of most of the cities with a full withdrawal of all troops expected at the end of 2011 (New York Times, 2013). Gradually, Iraqi security forces took over more and more territory and finally full control over security duties in June 2009, as most US troops official withdrew from the country (BBC News, 2017). In December 2011, there was a total withdrawal of American forces, despite the violence that remained. The war cost 4,400 American lives and more than 1 trillion US dollars (New York Times, 2013).

## Analysis

In the following section the author seeks to answer the research question by applying Mouritzen and Wivel’s model to explain US’s intervention in Iraq. The analysis is sectioned according to the three levels- the system, interstate and intrastate level. The theories pertaining at each level are meant to provide us with different insights into the reasons behind the intervention and help explain US’s decision to intervene militarily. The aim here is to investigate whether the model can explain why US chose to intervene in Iraq. In order to achieve that we start at the system level and explore whether it holds explanatory power in relation to our case. If needed we climb down the explanatory ladder and explore the interstate and intrastate level.

### *The systemic level*

At the system level, we explain foreign policy strategy as a state's response to anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system. As described in the theory section, this has implications for how a state decides its foreign policies. Through foreign policies states are expected to ensure their own security and survival and relative power vis-à-vis other states (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 29-30). In the following section we intend to investigate whether we can explain US's decision to intervene in Iraq as first a response to the security threat Iraq posed to US national security or secondly as a response to the threat to its position in the international system or to the principles of the unipolar world order.

According to structural realism, states need to focus on ensuring their own security and survival as there is no higher authority that can protect them in case international laws are violated and other states try to threaten their security and sovereignty. As there is no actor capable of structuring the relations of all nation states, states are in a constant state of attention to potential threats (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 29-30). Hence, the US would react to any potential threat to its domestic security. According to President Bush, the regime of Saddam Hussein represented an imminent threat to American national security to which it eventually responded by intervening militarily. Indeed, national security was the main justification for going to war. President Bush emphasized that Iraq represented a danger to the American people as it held weapons of mass destruction and had links to the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, who were responsible for the attacks from 9/11 (New York Times, 2003).

In response to the perceived security threat, US's foreign policy strategy in Iraq between the period of 2003 and 2011 was that of balancing. Balancing as a foreign policy strategy means that the security or power challenger is countered with negative sanctions. The sanctions may vary and can either be hard in form of military action or soft, that is, diplomatic and institutional policies. The strategy also assumes that action has to be taken to counteract the challenger as otherwise further threats and offenses will follow. Evidently, a state's possibility of responding to such threats depends on its power capabilities, such as economic sanctions or credible military action. Hence, the state has to defend itself and employ hard or soft balancing in proportion to the level of threat and capabilities available (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 21).

US's actions from the 90s until the end of the invasion showed that US was constant in its strategy towards Iraq and it kept on balancing the power asserter though several negative sanctions in relation to its increase in military power which was thought to pose a threat to international security and a good supply of weaponry to terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda. In the

early 1990s US used soft balancing to counter the threat posed by Iraq and imposed many sanctions such as weapons inspections, set a no fly zone and even bombed several targets in Iraq with the scope of destroying nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. However, since 2002 President Bush started advocating for the imminent threat that Hussein's regime posed for international security and the need for hard balancing in form of military intervention (BBC News, 2017).

In his official address from March 2003 President Bush emphasized the threat Saddam Hussein posed to the world and gave the Iraqi President an ultimatum declaring that unless he left the country, US forces were to be deployed as "*the security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein*". (New York Times, 2003). He went further saying that "*peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again because we are not dealing with peaceful men. Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised*". In this case then "*the United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security*" (New York Times, 2003). The President's response was in accordance with the strategy of balancing according to which such a threat was to be counteracted before it got bigger and the US disposed of the credible military means to respond to it.

Nonetheless, these statements were soon shown to be merely exaggerations by weapons inspectors and intelligence officers investigating the situation on the ground. Indeed, even before the US troops were deployed in Iraq, there was evidence that questioned the assertions of the administration and even more importantly that President Bush was aware of these facts. Hans Blix, the head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission who was responsible for leading the inspection of the WMD in Iraq declared in February 2003 that following a thorough search covering more than 300 sites, including industrial sites, ammunition depots, military camps, presidential sites, research laboratories and others, no evidence of weapons of mass destruction was found. Blix's findings were consistent with Iraq's official statement on the matter (The Guardian, 2003).

Intelligence coming from the closest sources to Saddam Hussein that Western forces ever got point to the same idea. In spring 2012, the CIA was informed that a high ranking member within Saddam Hussein's circle was interested in defecting and that it had valuable intel of interest to the US. The source, Iraq's Foreign Minister, Naji Sabri told an intermediate source working with the CIA that while the Iraqi President was interested in developing WMD,

biological, nuclear and chemical, he had none at that point in time. Taylor also pointed to the fact that President Bush was informed of the deal between the CIA and Naji Sabri. According to Murray, the head of the operation at the CIA, the report containing the intelligence obtained from the Iraqi Minister was modified and used selectively. He stated: *“Very bad intelligence got to the leadership very quickly but other intelligence just didn’t make it”*. In the same line of thought, in January 2003, the head of the Iraqi Intelligence Tahir Habbush Al Tikriti met with an officer from MI6 in an attempt to avoid a military intervention in Iraq or to provide a safe exit for Saddam Hussein. Habbush emphasized that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The intelligence was disregarded and thought to be fabricated by the Iraqi President (Tayler, 2013).

Furthermore, John Nixon, former CIA analyst and the man who led the interrogation of Saddam Hussein following his capture in 2003, declared that after interviewing the Iraqi President, his advisers and having conducted subsequent research on the ground it became clear that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam terminated the nuclear weapons programme years before. Ironically, “his team were regarded as “failures” after they came to that conclusion” and were considered unsuccessful in their assignment as they were unable to find the evidence required. Nixon went further saying: *“I used to think what we said at the CIA mattered and the president would listen, but it doesn’t matter what we say, politics trumps intelligence”* (Mortimer, 2017). This is in accordance with Murray’s statement that the intelligence aligning with the administration’s interests was favored over that which contradicted them.

Even today, despite the taboo which still exists in the Republican Party concerning the intervention, President Trump boldly stated that there were no weapons of mass destruction and that President Bush knew this but still chose to send military forces to Iraq. He went further saying that the war destabilized the Middle East, caused thousands of deaths, cost \$2 trillion and led to the emergence of ISIS, all because of “cooked up intel”. Actually the U.S. Army Joint Captured Material Exploitation Group teams only found *“some old, corroded, un-useable, “demilitarized” artillery shells rotting in the desert from the 1980s, a far cry from the active, threatening chemical, biological and even nuclear WMD program we were repeatedly told by Bush, Cheney, Powell, Rice and Rumsfeld that Iraq possessed”* (Williams, 2017).

Another matter of national security that President Bush stressed when referring to Iraq was the link between Al-Qaeda and Iraq. According to the President, Iraq aided the terrorist group and

supplied it with weaponry which the terrorists could use against America and other states (New York Times, 2003). However, in July 2004, the commission appointed by President Bush and the US Congress, responsible for investigating the events leading up to 9/11 and the ties between Al Qaeda and Iraq, concluded that there were no real evidence of operational ties between the two. While the 9/11 commission and the Bush administration agreed that there were contacts between the terrorist group and Iraq, there was no evidence pointing to an actual collaboration between the two regarding a potential attack on America nor was there any connection between Iraq, Al-Qaeda and 9/11. The commission revealed that Iraq did not pose a threat to national security and the reasons for the invasion were highly challenged (Milbank, 2004). This is opposition with what President Bush declared in 2003, when he portrayed the war as part of the battle of fighting terrorism worldwide. While the evidence showing that Bush knew that Saddam Hussein was not harbouring weapons of mass destruction might be debatable, when it comes to the links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda, there is little doubt that the President and its administration did not know that there were no facts supporting the operational ties. According to Richard Clarke, a former antiterrorism chief in Bush's administration, the President was informed of the lack of collaborative relationship before the invasion (New York Times, 2004). The fact that the link between Al Qaeda and Iraq was not based on facts was also confirmed by Geoff Millard, one of the agents deployed to work in Iraq in the intelligence sector who declared that during many of the discussions with its intelligence fellows, it became clear that the links were fabricated by the US, rather than them being based on facts and reliable intelligence (Al-Jazeera, 2011).

The discrepancies between the administration's statements and the experts on the ground together with the independent commissions tasked to investigate Iraq's nuclear programme and its links to Al-Qaeda point to the fact that the national security threat was exaggerated and that the intelligence was often chosen purposely to correspond to the reasons used to "sell" the war. This points to the importance of our research question. If the main reasons that President Bush outlined for intervening in Iraq were sooner or later revealed to not be supported by facts, then how can we explain the decision to intervene? While, we recognize the possible fallacy behind intelligence, it is not enough to explain the determination with which the administration "sold the war" despite UN controversy.

We continue by exploring whether we can explain US decision to intervene in Iraq as a response to the threat Iraq posed to US's unique position in the international system or to the principles of the unipolar world order. At the system level we expect states to react to changes

in the international system that affect their power and position. According to structural realism the unipole is interested to keep the balance of power inclined to its favor as it benefits from the asymmetry of the power distribution in the system and would react if the unipolar world order was threatened. In response to potential threats from other nation-states, the unipole would respond by providing “insecurity” to power challengers in order to constrain them and prevent other states from the international system to become challengers too. Basically the unipole would make it costly for any power asserter to challenge its position. Apart from the significant power the unipole enjoys and tries to preserve in the international system, the political project on which the unipolar world is based is also important and crucial for maintaining its position (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 102). Thus, the system level could explain US’s decision to intervene if we can show that Iraq posed a challenge to the unipolar position of the US or if violated US’s political project. In this case we would expect US’s strategy towards Iraq to reflect the threat posed.

We begin by exploring the hypothesis according to which Iraq posed a threat to US’s position in the international system. To achieve that standard power parameters for US and Iraq in terms of population, territory, economy, and military as reflected in 2003, will be compared. In 2003, Iraq had a population of 25, 63 million compared to US’s 290, 1 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003; The World Bank, 2017a). Iraq’s GDP was the 82th in the ranking of GDP worldwide with \$15,800 million, compared to the leading economy US’s \$11,510,700 million (Country Economy, 2003). Actually, Iraq’s GDP declined since 1989 until Saddam was overthrown and it never regained its 1989 level. This was mainly due to the oil embargo on exports that followed the invasion of Kuwait (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). Military, US again led the charts as it spent 415, 22\$ billion on its military power and disposed of 1,434, 377 active military personnel, while Iraq at the time of the American invasion had only 40% of the armed forces it had at the 1991 Gulf War level 1 million troops which represented approximately 40, 000 troops (Coleman, 2015; Otterman, 2005; Statista, 2017). The many sanctions which the international community posed on Iraq prevented it from developing modern weaponry and military training and techniques compared to US’s massive investments in bettering their military (Otterman, 2005). Iraq’s territory was 437,370 sq. km compared to US’s territory of 9, 161, 920 sq. km (World Bank, 2017b). Evidently, Iraq did not represent a challenge to US’s unique position and as the sanctions imposed affected and decreased Iraq’s military and economic power, there was no indication that it will become a challenger in the near future.

I will continue by exploring whether Iraq represented a challenge to US's political project. US's political project was based on principles which became universal since the end of World War II. The project was based on the liberal doctrines of freedom of capital, goods, movement, human rights, democracy, equality and the elimination of spheres of interest. Many of these values were institutionalized through organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and NATO. Intervention in another state's affairs was deemed justifiable if the principles of the unipolar world order were violated and not the interests of the intervening country. Evidently, in the line of thought of structural realism the principles of the unipolar world were to ensure they kept the world in asymmetry and that through those principles US would maintain its position (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2012: 32-33, 102).

Iraq on the other hand did not adhere to such principles. In 2003, Iraq was still a totalitarian regime under the leadership of Saddam Hussein who took control of the country in 1979 (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2002). He remained the leader of the country for more than 30 years, when the US forces forced him to flee Baghdad in 2003 (BBC News, 2017). Saddam Hussein's regime was characterized by state oppression, high surveillance on potential deterrents by party members who acted as informants for the political party, violence, repression and high control over security forces. Moreover, the President's Baath Party was based on a rewards and punishment system. Essentially, citizens were encouraged to join the party which would ensure them protection, while those that refused to join the party were kept under surveillance and threatened. By 2012, 17% of the Iraqi population was in the service of the party, with a few joining because they shared the Baathist ideology and many because of pressure and indoctrination (Gokpinar, 2013). There was no freedom of speech and movement and states representatives were appointed by the President rather than through electoral elections (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2002). Furthermore, Iraq was a centrally-directed command economy, where there was a lack of competition and creative destruction and where political power would often equal economic power (Sanford, 2003).

Iraq's regime then was in complete opposition to US's political project, nevertheless it could not be considered a real threat to the US. In 2003, global support for the principles of the "free world" established by the US was high in most countries from Europe, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa or Asia. States agreed on the principles of liberal democracy, human rights and free market economy (Pew Research Center, 2003). Furthermore, despite the popular belief that Saddam Hussein was in complete opposition with the US, it had two main things in

common. It was a strong advocate on fighting terrorism and extremism and it forbid Wahhabism and sentenced to death all followers of the ideology long before 9/11. Also, it was a clear opponent of Iran, which was of interest to America. Combating terrorism and restraining Iran's power projection in the Middle East were matters which have long been on the US agenda (TIME Magazine, 2012).

Despite the fact that President Bush strongly emphasized the threat Saddam Hussein and his regime posed to American security and safety, it was soon found that it did not dispose of weapons of mass destruction, nor was there a link between its regime and Al-Qaeda. Also, Iraq did not pose a threat to the unipolar's unique position and the political project. As US's security was not threatened by Iraq we consider that structural realism does not hold an explanatory power. In conclusion, the systemic level does not have an explanatory power in this case. We continue down the explanatory ladder, exploring whether the interstate considerations can provide better insights in US's decision.

#### *The interstate level*

At the interstate level we explain foreign policy as a state's response to the challenges it faces in the immediate geographic environment. The level presumes that a state's behaviour can be explained by the factors at work in its situational environment rather than by the state's characteristic of being part of the international system. Also, while the system level focuses on considerations of the power distribution in the international system and relative power calculations, the interstate level refers to the spatial context and the struggle of power regionally. As a consequence a state will respond to neighbouring states asserting power by either balancing, bandwagoning or be indifferent to the power asserter (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 34-35, 38, 106).

At this level, we focus on considerations of power and incentives in a state's proximate environment. Considering US's unique position in the international system, proximate environment represents its global sphere of interest. The US can project its power at a long distance and we see its action space as the global sphere (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 34-38). Evidently, Iraq was part of the unipole's global sphere of influence, playing an important role in the Middle East, a region of particular interest to the US. Thus, we seek to evaluate whether US's actions in Iraq can be explicated by its geopolitical and geoeconomical considerations in the region.



At the interstate level, we expect states to balance proximate power in case it is realistic (the state disposes of sufficient resources and there are no unmanageable costs in the short or long term), possible (the government is free to balance) and relevant (there is a nearby power asserter). All three conditions have to be fulfilled in order for balancing to materialize (Mouritzen, 2017: 641). According to the theory we expect the US to respond to a perceived power assertion threat from Iraq by balancing proximate power in case it was realistic, possible and relevant. It was certainly realistic for the US to invade Iraq as it disposed of the means to balance Iraq through military intervention. At the time of the invasion, the US was still the leading military power in the world, while Iraq's military power was insignificant compared to the hegemon's and significantly lower than the First Gulf War levels, in 1990 (Coleman, 2015; Otterman, 2005; Statista, 2017). Also, regardless of the already started military intervention in Afghanistan, US military power was not exhausted by it. Furthermore, as there was a considerable imbalance in military power between Iraq and US we do not assume that there could have been short or long term unbearable costs for the hegemon. Secondly, as a consequence of its great power status in the international system the US was free to balance as there was no other power at that point in time that could prevent it. However, we consider it was not relevant for the US to balance. US had geopolitical and geo-economics interests in the region, but none made the military intervention a necessity. Two considerations are of particular importance in this case: Israel's security and the oil considerations.

We continue elaborating the geopolitical and geoeconomical factors as reflected at the interstate level pushing for or against US's military intervention. Firstly, the regime of Saddam Hussein posed a threat to the security of Israel, a long term ally of the US. Nevertheless, we assume states only to intervene in case it is directly relevant for them. In this case, we expect US to intervene on Israel's behalf only if the lack of intervention were to affect US's security and strategic interests. In order to analyse whether Iraq's threat to Israel was directly affecting US we will first explore Israel and Iraq's relation and try to investigate whether it would harm the US not to act on behalf of its ally and whether it would be indirectly affected by the threat Saddam Hussein's regime posed to Israel.

Iraq and Israel's diplomatic relations were poor since 1948, when the Jewish state became independent from the British Empire. Iraq refused to recognize Israel as a state and was a strong advocate for the freedom of Palestine and it became involved in the Arab Israeli Wars from 1967 and 1973. Furthermore, during the First Gulf War Iraq continued its aggression towards Israel and fired 39 Scud missiles at the Jewish state. In 2000, President Saddam Hussein stated

its outrage towards the escalating violence between Israelis and Palestinians and condemned the Arab World for not intervening and called to violent action (BBC News, 2000). Also, Saddam Hussein was a major sponsor of funding for groups that conducted terrorist attacks on Israel and devoted tens of millions of dollars on anti-Israeli terrorism (Wallechinsky, 2011). Israel's major concern of Iraq's growing military power started in the mid-1970s when France arranged for Saddam Hussein to dispose of a nuclear reactor. In response, Israel targeted the reactor and managed to destroy it, however Saddam Hussein continued its nuclear programme in various secret locations. In the awe of the first Gulf War Israel strongly supported the American troops deployed to Kuwait, but was mostly concerned with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and destruction of the nuclear programme. While the US did not succeed in overthrowing the regime, UN sanctions and inspections on Iraq diminished, but did not eliminate Israel's security threat (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 233).

While US was in contradiction with Iraq and many other "rogue states" in the Middle East regarding the WMD and links to terrorist organizations, it could not be considered an actual threat to American strategic interests in the region, aside from US's commitment to Israel. US's main interest in the Middle East was oil and the need to ensure that no other country gained control over the region's commodity, which can explain US's intervention in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, who sought to take control of Kuwait's oil reserves and potentially Saudi Arabia's (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 71). However, Iraq's military power in 2003, at the time of the American invasion was considerably weakened when compared to the levels of the Gulf War and the economy was affected by the many sanctions imposed by the international community, thus there were no indications that Saddam Hussein posed a real threat to the domination of the Middle East and its oil (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007; Otterman, 2005). Also, US proved to be flexible as long as American interests are at stake as its support for Saddam Hussein's regime in the war against Iran showed in 1980 (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 71).

However, as Israel is one of US's strongest allies in the Middle East, it already invested substantially in strengthening Israel's security capabilities by providing economic aid, weaponry and developing the country's military strength (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007). Israel held weapons of mass destruction and according to Steinback "*the US was training Israeli nuclear scientists and providing nuclear-related technology, including a small 'research' reactor in 1955 under the 'Atoms for Peace' program*" (Pilger, 2001). However, we expect the US to actively act on Israel's behalf if we could show that Israel's "insecurity" would directly

impact the US. Evidently, while US was a strong ally of Israel, there is no indication that it would be significantly influenced by Iraq's perceived threat towards Israel. Also, while Israel remained a strategic partner for the US, Israel's security threat is not tantamount to US's and a potential attack on Israel, would have not affected US directly. This was also confirmed by Phillip Zelikow, executive director of the 9/11 Commission and counsellor to the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who declared openly that Saddam Hussein did not pose a threat to the United States, but rather to Israel. Also former NATO commander Wesley Clark mentioned in August 2002 that the Iraqi regime was not a direct threat to the US, but that in case Saddam Hussein had WMD there was a high chance he will use them against Israel (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 231). We expected US to intervene in Iraq due to concerns for Israel's security if we could show that it would harm the US not to act on behalf of its ally's security. However, as presented above, the only stake for the US was its commitment to Israel and the interest in preventing other countries from dominating the region, which considering Iraq's weakened military and economic power, seemed unlikely. Hence, we don't consider it relevant for the US to balance Iraq based on this consideration.

We continue exploring whether US's geoeconomical considerations in the region made it relevant for US to intervene in Iraq. As mentioned above, a crucial goal for the US in the region was to prevent other countries from dominating the Middle East and the Persian Gulf oil. Saudi Arabia already highlighted this concern in the early 90s when it feared an Iraqi domination of the oil's region. Hence it supported the American troops deployed to push Iraqi troops out of Kuwait and contain the regime as it feared a potential invasion of Saudi Arabia as well. Unless restrained, such a scenario were to give Saddam Hussein power over oil supplies from Kuwait and potentially Saudi Arabia, which would be in contradiction to American and Saudi interests in preventing domination over the region's commodity (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 254).

Following Iraq's invasion in Kuwait, Iraq controlled 19% of the global oil reserves. Having invaded Saudi Arabia as well Iraq were to control 40% of the oil's region. The idea that Saddam Hussein could control up to 40% of world's supply of oil was to pose a threat in terms of regional control over the region's oil, a threat to Israel and increase its chances of developing WMD (Price-Smith: 87). However, in response to the threat posed by Iraq, Saudi oil reserves were at the time of the American invasion secured and protected by Saudi and American troops (New York Times, 2002). Hence, the threat posed could be managed through deterrence and maybe a bigger deployment of US troops, but it did not make the military intervention in Iraq necessary (Layne, 1991).

Another US goal in the Middle East was to protect oil supplies and maintain oil price stability. However, we assume that a military intervention in Iraq would not serve American national interest in oil as the intervention would rather be costly to the nation and destabilize oil prices (Cramer and Thrall, 2012: 11). Hinnebusch also concluded that while oil was an important consideration for the US it did not make the military intervention a necessity and that it would lead to a disruption of the oil market that would harm both the US and world economy. He went further saying that the key to how US managed this consideration lies in the hands of the ruling coalition at the time. Had there been a different administration in power we might have seen a different response and foreign policy towards Iraq. The Iraqi regime did not pose an imminent threat and all other containment options were not exhausted at the time (Hinnebusch, 2007). This is also confirmed by Cramer which claimed that while regime change would have had many benefits, there were still other policy options unexplored. Thus the potential threat alone did not require an intervention, nor were all the other options fully explored (Cramer & Thrall, 2012: 201-238). In the end, the intervention cost trillions, thousands of lives and led to the emergence of ISIS, which were all against American's national interest (Williams, 2017). Additionally, Saddam Hussein did not necessarily pose a threat to oil price stability as the President was interested to sell his oil. We expected US to invade the country only if it were for oil from Iraq to not flow to the global oil market and thus disrupt oil flow and affect oil prices (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 254). Thus, the economic interests in the region, cannot explain US's foreign policy decision in Iraq.

In conclusion, the interstate level does not hold explanatory power in this case. US's geopolitical considerations in the region did not make the military intervention a necessity. Israel's security was not tantamount to that of US's nor was in US's benefit to act on Israel's behalf as a threat to Israel from Saddam Hussein's regime was not to affect US. Also, there was no geoeconomic necessity at stake which would have made the military intervention inevitable and an intervention was to affect and rather destabilize global oil prices and create instability in the market, which was against US's national interest. Neither the systemic considerations nor the geopolitical interests in the area can explain the intervention. Therefore, we continue down the explanatory ladder and investigate whether the intrastate particularities can shed light over the decision to intervene in Iraq.

### *The intrastate level*

At the intrastate level we analyze the peculiarities pertaining to US's domestic level and the decision making peculiarities. Essentially, we investigate the role of the Israel lobby and the neoconservatives in the decision to attack Iraq.

### *The Israel Lobby*

In the following section, we investigate the role of the Israel Lobby in US's decision to attack Iraq. According to Mearsheimer and Walt, the Israel lobby in Washington was the principle cause of American involvement in the Middle East. They argue that the lobby has influence on several institutions that are part of the American decision making process such as the media, universities, different think tanks, Congress, the president and the executive branch. Basically, the Israel lobby represents a collation of individuals and organizations working actively to influence American policy in the Middle East that favours Israel. The Lobby is primarily composed of American Jews but also of Christians for whom Israel is of particular importance due to religious beliefs. Furthermore, part of the Lobby are also governmental Israeli officials, whom Americans often consult in various political matters. The lobby's common philosophy that drives its work is the belief in the need to support Israel but also in ensuring protection against public criticism of Israeli policies. While the two authors emphasize that the lobby is not concentrated or organized in a single organization, they do point in particular to a single one that is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose influence and lobby they highlight. The individuals and organizations that represent the Lobby achieve their goal of supporting Israel by many means. They support and vote pro-Israel candidates, they begin different actions targeted at influencing the governmental officials that were elected through their support and the other policy makers to support their preferred policies. They do so by means of contributing financially to the campaigns of the candidates for public office or to various pro-Israel organizations (Lieberman, 2009: 236).

If the Israel lobby influenced US's decision to invade Iraq, as Mearsheimer and Walt point out, then we should be able to show whether the interest group can be considered effective in affecting American foreign policy. Also whether Israel and the lobby were interested in pushing for a war in Iraq or if it was in Israel's interest that US invaded Iraq.

According to the three criteria developed by Smith the Israeli lobby would be effective in influencing US foreign policy if it would have the ability to provide votes in key areas, to make considerable campaign contributions to office seekers and to organize and lobby on key matters (McCormick, 2012: 72). According to McCormey "*By virtually all assessments, the Jewish*

*lobby, or the Israel lobby, is perhaps the most influential ethnic lobby today with the preponderance of its attention on issues related to the state of Israel and to the Middle East more generally” (McCormick, 2012: 70).*

Firstly, American Jews voters are concentrated in key states from the east coast (New Jersey, New York, Florida and in lower percentages in Maryland and Massachusetts) but also in California, Illinois and Ohio. While the Jewish population only represents 2.3% (6 millions) of the American population, the areas where most of it is concentrated has tremendous political power. Basically, the 10 states with the highest percentage of Jews provide 244 of the 270 electoral votes required to elect the president of the United States. These numbers only consider the ethnically Jewish population, however if we were to add the non-Jews that support Israel, it would show that pro-Israeli voters are a significant group able to provide a considerable number of votes. Hence, presidential candidates tend to be sensitive to the interest group’s concerns and interests as they represent a significant proportion of the votes in key areas that have the highest number of electoral votes. (Bard, 2017; (McCormick, 2012: 72). Not only that the pro-Israeli supporters can provide votes in key areas, but they also tend to be highly implicated in political affairs. Compared to any other population group in America, Jews are the most implicated group in elections, voting, contributing to campaigns and getting involved in electoral work at both the state and national level (Terry, 2005: 10).

Secondly, pro-Israeli groups make considerable campaign contributions to office seekers. In 2008, pro-Israel groups made campaign contributions through the political action committees (PACs) of \$13.5 million with 63% of the amount going to the Democratic Party while 37% to the Republican candidates (McCormick, 2012: 72). Additionally, among the 400 contributors to the 2000 US national elections, 125 out of the top 250 contributors were Jewish. In 2012, the biggest donor to American campaigns was the Israeli Sheldon Adelson who contributed with approximately \$100 million to the Republican campaigns. While Adelson’s funding went to the Republican party, another Israeli billionaire, Haim Saban, supported the Democratic Party mentioning that he is a “one-issue guy and [his] issue is Israel”. While the two billionaires supported different parties, they agreed that regarding Israel they are on the same side (Weber, 2009).

Furthermore, through PACs funding can also be provided to office seekers who oppose those candidates that argue for policies which go against Israel’s interests. The number of pro-Israeli PACs grew significantly since the mid-80s and by 2003 it reached over 100 committees with

a financial contribution of \$41.3 million to candidates and parties who support the Zionist interests between 1990 and 2004. Also, while the Arab Americans are relatively new and do not have such a long-lasting tradition of providing financial funding to pursue and protect their rights in the Middle East, it is often difficult for established politicians to accept and to suddenly change their established relations with the American Jews (Terry, 2005: 40-41;78).

Thirdly, according to Smith we assume the Israel lobby to be effective in influencing American policy if we could show that it has the ability to organize and lobby on key matters. According to Terry AIPAC is the most effective interest group when it comes to the politics of the Middle East (Terry, 2005: 29). In regards to its organizational and lobbying skills AIPAC is of particular importance. The organization represents the official formal entity that carries the responsibility of lobbying Israel's interests to the US government. AIPAC has a budget of \$100 million, is appealing to both the Executive and Legislative Branch and seeks to be nonpartisan. Also, it is seen as the most powerful foreign policy lobby and was declared as early as 1998 and 1999 as the second most powerful interest group, following the American Association for Retired Persons. The lobby also enjoys an organisational network which allows for its policy preferences to be advanced. The network is comprised of 75 organizations which have directors in AIPAC who can easily contribute with information and counselling to the decision making process provided by the different organizations. Also, the structure of the organizations help circulate information which can be useful in case an immediate response is required in response to legislative activity (Bard, 2017).

In accordance with Smith's criteria, the Israel Lobby seems effective in affecting American foreign policy due to the high percentage of American Jews living in the areas that provide most electoral votes in presidential elections and their involvement in politics, rather high compared to other population groups. Also, the biggest individual contributors and pro-Israeli PACs have a long tradition of making tremendous financial contributions to candidates and parties that support Israel's interests. Lastly, the lobby's strong network and organisational framework make it easy for the lobby to advance its policy preferences in the Executive and Legislative Branch.

We continue exploring whether it was in the interest of Israel and that of the lobby for the US to invade Iraq. As described in the interstate section, the regime of Saddam Hussein posed a threat to Israel's security and it was in Israel's interest to support an American invasion in Iraq. As described by Mearsheimer and Walt the Israel lobby joined the neoconservatives and

advocated for an invasion of Iraq long before President Bush took the final decision. Thus, while pro-Israeli forces did not begin the campaign of pushing towards the invasion, it certainly played a significant role in advancing the policy preference that would reduce the insecurity threat towards Israel (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 234).

The Israelis started their advocacy in the spring of 2002 - from Benjamin Netanyahu which presented himself in front of US Senators and the Washington Post to the foreign minister advocating on CNN, they declared that unless something is done to restrain Saddam Hussein's power then we should expect him to use the WMD against American soil and that the Iraqi President represented an equal threat to Osama bin-Laden. Additionally, before Vice President Cheney started the campaign for war, many media outlets, such as Ha'aretz, the Washington Post, CBS News and CNN emphasized that Israel was pressuring the administration to not postpone the attack on Iraq (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 234-235).

The lobby's activity to pressure for war can also be seen by observing AIPAC's activities. AIPAC, Israel's most prominent lobby organization was absolutely supportive of Israel and as Israel was pushing for the war in Iraq then all thousands members of AIPAC on Capitol Hill were dedicated to lobbying for the invasion. AIPAC's strong devotion to the cause was also expressed in 2003 by Howard Kohr who declared that "quietly lobbying Congress to approve the use of force in Iraq" was one of "AIPAC's successes over the past year". Furthermore, AIPAC's policy director while the invasion was still under consideration directly declared that "AIPAC lobbied Congress in favour of the Iraq War" (Goldberg, 2005). AIPAC is as influential in its domain which mainly concerns affairs related to Israel's financial and territorial security and the Middle East as the National Rifle Association is in theirs, despite the fact that AIPAC only has a hundred thousand members compared to NRA's four million (Goldberg, 2005).

### [The neoconservatives](#)

In order to account for the role of the neoconservatives in the decision to attack Iraq we investigate the evidence and trace the events that led to the decision. We seek to evaluate whether the evidence can show that the neocons played crucial roles in the foreign policy choice. In order to understand what drove the hawkish group we investigate their background and whether they were interested in removing Saddam Hussein from power.

Lieven summarized the neoconservative belief: *"The basic and generally agreed plan is unilateral world domination through absolute military superiority, and this has been consistently advocated and worked on by the group of intellectuals close to Dick Cheney and*



*Richard Perle since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s*". Lieven also stated that one of the core beliefs of the neoconservative thought was the credence in pre-emptive war to eliminate any potential threat to US global dominance (Cook, 2008: 24-25). Additionally, many of the neoconservatives were American Jews, but not all of them. However, the group was known for the affinity and sympathy it expressed on many occasions towards Israel. Many of them had close ties to Israel's main lobby organizations in Washington in particular to AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (Cook, 2008: 23). To elaborate on the special connection between neocons and the Israeli cause, key persons within the Bush administration who eventually occupied important positions in the Pentagon, the White House and State Department and their background will be presented.

Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, two of the key neocons who would later play important roles in the Bush administration and who were affiliated with the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (a hawkish pro-Iraq war institute) together with David Wurmser (later the Vice President's Dick Cheney's advisor on the Middle East) co-authored *the Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*. The paper published in 1996 by the Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies was a direct address at the newly elected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu regarding the toppling of Saddam Hussein and transformation of the Middle East so that it served American and Israeli interests (Cooley, 2005). The paper was presenting a direction for how Israel should transform its strategic environment starting with removing Saddam Hussein and changing the leadership in Iraq. To achieve the reshaping of the Middle East, President Benjamin Netanyahu was encouraged to win American support by formulating the policies *"in language familiar to the Americans by tapping into themes of American administrations during the cold war which apply well to Israel"*. The report was of particular importance as the key authors were to later occupy significant positions in the Bush administration (Whitaker, 2002). Richard Perle, who later became a member of the Defence Policy Board at the Pentagon during Bush's term was also found delivering classified information from the National Security Council to the Israeli embassy. At the same time, Douglas Feith, Under-Secretary of Policy in the Pentagon in Bush's administration, was known for its strong advocacy for Israel's rights in his writings vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli matters (Cook, 2008: 23-24).

Subsequently, in 1998, another paper was co-signed by Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld (later Defence Secretary), Paul Wolfowitz (deputy defence secretary), John Bolton (undersecretary of state for arms control and international security) and Elliot Abrams (in charge of Middle

East policy at the National Security Council) among others, was sent to President Clinton. In the letter, the neocons criticized the American policy on Iraq and mentioned that the threat existing in the Middle East was far greater than anything since the end of the Cold War. Later that year, the same group sent a message to the speaker of the House of Representatives and the Senate Majority Leader and conveyed that the strategy of containment of the Iraqi President was fruitless and in consequence the group advised for “the removal of Saddam and his regime from power” (Cook, 2008: 26).

Moreover, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defence was awarded the title of “Man of the Year” by the Jerusalem Post and was considered to be a strong advocate of US-Israel relation (Stephens, 2003). Following US’s intervention in Kuwait, during the elder Bush term, according to Perle, Wolfowitz declared that he “*wanted to finish Saddam's regime, and not only did he want to finish it, he believed there was a strong basis for doing so*” (Fisher, 2016). Ever since he remained a strong advocate for the removal of Saddam and was considered to have pushed for removing Saddam longer and more assiduously than anyone (Ahmad, 2014: 118).

The neocon faction of the administration that pushed for war was driven by the belief that toppling Saddam Hussein was to improve US’s and Israel’s strategic position and begin a process of transformation of the Middle East that would serve both US and Israel. In their aid, the Israel lobby joined forces as the removal of Saddam Hussein, a long enemy of Israelis, was to reduce Israel’s security threat (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 230). The neocons always considered Saddam Hussein an enemy and while the pro-war faction was present in American politics before Bush’s administration, their case for the removal of Iraqi President was largely pushed aside. During the Reagan administration, Perle acted as Assistant Defence Secretary and the future Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney for President Bush, brought many neoconservatives in their staff during their previous work in the Republican administrations. However, during the Clinton administration the neocons, in particular Perle, Woolsey and Wolfowitz successfully lobbied and managed to put regime change in Iraq on the agenda and in 1998 Congress passed the Iraqi Liberation Act according to which “*it should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime*”. Moreover, according to the legislation \$97 million were to be given to groups who sought the removal of the regime. Of particular importance was the Iraqi National Congress (INC) lead by an ally of the neocons, Ahmed Chalabi. While no

military action was taken at that point, the neocons managed to make regime change in Iraq a strategic goal for the United States (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 244).

What changed the dynamics were the events of 9/11, which represented a major shift in America's foreign policy and was an opportunity which the neoconservatives placed in key positions at that time were able to exploit to their benefit (Cook, 2008: 25-28). While before the tragic events there were no public records that could show that Bush and Cheney were seriously interested in pushing for war in Iraq prior to 9/11 they were convinced by their fellow neoconservatives' colleagues, in particular by Paul Wolfowitz, Scooter Libby and Bernard Lewis. According to Kagan what put them at good odds in advancing their world views was their "ready-made approach to the world" in a context where Bush and Cheney were unable to make any sense of the devastating events which at that point appeared to require a new approach in how America was to respond to the international world and thus a turning point for the administration's foreign policy (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 245-246).

Richard Clarke, terrorism advisor and Paul O'Neil, Treasury Secretary asserted that an attack on Iraq was mentioned during the first meeting of the National Security Council following 9/11 (Hinnebusch, 2007). While Cheney declared on September 16 that Iraq was not related to the events, Perle started his public advocacy and declared in the same day that there is evidence regarding the operational ties between Osama bin Laden and Iraq. Three days later he held a meeting at the Pentagon to discuss the threat posed by the regime of Saddam Hussein. At the meeting, Wolfowitz and Feith were also present, while the State Department which did not support the war was left aside. Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the INC and Bernard Lewis were also brought on board to advance their thoughts on why regime change in Baghdad was required. Chalabi argued for invading Iraq and not Afghanistan and he was the source of many of the intelligence which was eventually used to "prove" the links between Saddam Hussein and 9/11. Bernard Lewis, or the most influential pro- Iraq war intellectual argued that the events of 9/11 could have ended more tragically if the terrorists were to dispose of WMD and Iraq was one of regime that was developing them. The intellectual's influence on the administration's foreign policy choice was also expressed by the Vice President: *"I firmly believe, along with men like Bernard Lewis, who is one of the great students of that part of the world [the Middle East], that strong, firm U.S. response to terror and to threats to the United States would go a long way, frankly, towards calming things in that part of the world."* He was also invited to the White House and discussed the Islamic world with Bush and Condoleezza Rice and went public often to show his support for war on Iraq. The Lewis

doctrine explained that Bin Laden's Muslim base and Saddam Hussein's reject of the West were parts of the same problem. Also, that when treating with Arabs, force was considered the only method they understood. This philosophy was influential especially on Cheney and Rumsfeld and appeared to guide the foreign policy choice in Iraq: "*Bernard comes with a very powerful explanation for why 9/11 happened. Once you understand it, the policy presents itself afterwards.*" (Ahmad, 2014: 112-114).

Apart from Bernard Lewis, other neocons from his staff like Eric Edelman and John Hannah played a crucial role in influencing Cheney. The most significant influence was attributed to Scooter Libby, the Vice President's chief of staff who held similar views regarding Iraq as his mentor, Paul Wolfowitz. According to the New York Times, officials from the Administration led by Wolfowitz and Libby were pushing for military intervention against the Osama bin Laden group in Afghanistan but also against terrorist bases in Iraq and Lebanon. Considering Cheney's stance on the matter, President Bush was aided in considering military intervention as a real option for Iraq (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 246-247).

Lastly, one of main pro-war neocons Wolfowitz, distinguished himself by pushing for war as early as September 15 when the top advisers in the Administration met at Camp David to discuss 9/11. The Deputy Secretary of Defence advocated for war and stated that although the evidence does not point in that direction, there is certainly a 10-15% chance that Saddam Hussein was involved in the tragic events and that a war with Iraq was to be easier than with Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2014: 118). While Bush went to war against Afghanistan, it seemed that following Wolfowitz strong advocacy on the matter, the President assigned military planners to establish a strategy for the military attack (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 246).

For the neoconservatives to advance their war plans they needed to find a way to make an attack on Iraq legitimate. In relation to this, the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group (PCEG) was established under the leadership of Douglas Feith. The Group was initiated as a particular intelligence unit, in order to find the evidence that the CIA supposedly missed regarding the operational ties between Al-Qaeda and 9/11. According to a source from the Pentagon, "Israeli intelligence played a hidden role in convincing Wolfowitz that he couldn't trust the CIA" (Risen, 2007: 73). Also, PCEG "*seemed to be devoted overwhelmingly, perhaps exclusively, to the purpose of assembling these scraps of information that would point to links between Iraq and Al Qaida . . . the driving force here, quite clear, was the attempt . . . at the*

*policy level to link the whole Iraq war to the idea of terrorism and the mood of the public after 9/11.*” (Ahmad, 2014: 124).

In comparison to the CIA, PCEG did not rely on established methods to produce intelligence, but rather used unreliable sources, previously dismissed by the CIA as they had no basis. Much of the intelligence used to demonstrate the need to attack Iraq was based on evidence from sources provided by Ahmed Chalabi, who was the leader of INC, one of the groups committed to overthrow Saddam and Washington’s favourite for the leadership in Iraq following the removal of Saddam Hussein. Also, Chalabi had close ties to the Jewish Institute for National Security of America and many other pro-Israeli organizations such as AIPAC and the American Enterprises Institute who considered him a future ally in the Middle East, while Chalabi promised to encourage a peaceful and fruitful relationship with Israel were he to gain power in Iraq. Following the invasion he acknowledged that the intelligence he provided to the Americans was arranged so that it supports the arguments for the invasion and accelerate the attack on Iraq. The CIA also affirmed that the intelligence was picked in a way so that it served the interest of certain civilians in the Pentagon who held strong pro-Iraq war world views (Ahmad, 2014: 124-125; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 244, 251-251). The PCEG was established by Rumsfeld under the leadership of Feith and other neocons and formed a parallel against the CIA and the other defence agencies (Landay, 2015). Greg Thielmann, chief of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) declared that *“I didn’t know about its [PCEG’s] existence. They were cherry-picking intelligence and packaging it for [Vice President] Cheney and [Defense Secretary] Donald Rumsfeld to take to the president. That’s the kind of rogue operation that peer review is intended to prevent.”* (Blumenthal, 2004, 26).

We argue that the influence exerted by the neoconservatives and the Israel lobby was decisive for the decisions taken by the ultimate decision makers President Bush and Vice President Cheney. President Bush was well known for his lack of experience on foreign affairs and instead surrounded himself with knowledgeable advisors. In fact as early as the 2000 presidential campaign George W. Bush stated that he will be “surrounded by good, strong, capable, smart people” to compensate for his lack of knowledge (Saunders, 2018). The lack of understanding of foreign policy was reflected among others, in his incapacity to name the President of Pakistan, Taiwan and India, acknowledging that he still had many things to learn (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003). Sniegowski regards President Bush as a convert to the neoconservative ideology after 9/11. The practice of inexperienced Presidents falling under the command of advisors is common in history and it is very relevant for George Bush who

displayed and publicly acknowledged his limitations on foreign affairs and the increased role that his advisors will have (Sniegowski, 2008: 3-8).

The President's inexperience allowed Cheney, a man who had a vast knowledge on foreign affairs, to take the upper hand in the decision making process of the Iraq War planning (Saunders, 2018). As Bush was a novice he delegated and empowered his advisors, especially Cheney and Rumsfeld in foreign policy. Bush lacked the understanding that would allow him to ask key questions in the decision making process. Often during the preparation for the war in Iraq he would be easily satisfied with answers, rather than playing his role of supervising and critically assessing his advisors perceptions and thus acting as ultimate decision maker. Instead he would leave this task to Condoleezza Rice, but she was less experienced than Cheney and Rumsfeld which left her little room to influence and monitor the two (Saunders, 2017: 22-24). In fact, Rice's National Security Council (NSC) was responsible for managing interagency disputes, such as those arising between Cheney's national security team, the CIA and State Department and for rationalizing the different perspectives of the departments to contain the agendas of interest groups such as the neocons (Halper and Clarke, 2004: 218). However, according to a former top CIA official Rice was a *"very, very weak national security advisor [who] didn't really manage anything...I think the real national security advisor was Cheney, and so Cheney and Rumsfeld could do what they wanted"*(Ahmad: 129). Evidently managing the competing views coming from experienced seniors was not to be easy but doable. However, this was not the case here and NSC's incapacity turned into an institutional failure which gave way to a certain group already consolidated to advance their policy preferences (Halper and Clarke, 2004: 218).

Cheney however was not a neoconservative, but identified himself with ideas similar to those of the neoconservatives. He was more of an "American nationalist" whose ideas regarding military power corresponded to those supported by the neocons regarding American exceptionalism and power. Also, he was close to the neoconservative elite as reflected by the fact that prior to his Vice Presidency he was a member on the board of advisors at the Jewish National Institute for Public Affairs, the American Enterprise Institute and a founding member of the neoconservative think tank the Project for a New American Century. Cheney's grip on the direction of the Administration is also suggested by the fact that the VP was tasked with appointing the new administration's staff. He used this to configure the national security staff with key neoconservative officials such as Wolfowitz, Perle, Feith and Libby (Sniegowski, 2008: 114-115). The power and influence Cheney gained through the appointment of key officials

can be summarized as following: “when coalition forces invaded Iraq in March 2003, the vice-president’s office was the command centre for a web of like-minded individuals in the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, and other agencies, often described by former officials as ‘Dick Cheney’s spies’” (Dreyfuss, 2006). The fact that the staff of the VP were operating at different levels of the decision making process managed to overcome opposition from State Department, the National Security Council and other Defence bodies (Dreyfuss, 2006).

Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defence or the third authority in the state after the President and the Vice-President was appointed by Cheney and was as well as him an assertive nationalist. He also believed in US’s primacy, unilateralism and strong defence against the enemies of the state. The combination between Rumsfeld and Cheney was powerful as both had similar views on defence and foreign matters and on the importance of “the strategy of the demonstration effect” which would later translate in demonstrating US’s great power by attacking Iraq. This overcame the precautionary view of Secretary of State Powell who was more of a realist the same as President Bush when he entered the Presidency. It is worth mentioning though that Cheney and Rumsfeld did not share the neoconservative ideology of advancing aggressively US values (democracy) abroad, as Wolfowitz and Perle. They agreed on deterring any potential threat to the US by use of military force and on the power of force and resolve compared to treaties and diplomacy in managing disputes. However, the assertive nationalists did not see it as US’s responsibility to spread democracy in the Middle East. Thus we can observe a consensus on some matters between the assertive nationalists and the neoconservatives, but also differences in other regards (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003: 14-15; Danner, 2014; Ritchie and Rogers, 2007: 152-155).

The top decision makers of the foreign affairs and defence agencies then were not neoconservatives. Condoleezza Rice National Security Advisor and Collin Powell Secretary of State indicated a realist direction for the administration of George W. Bush. On the other hand Cheney and Rumsfeld were categorized as “assertive nationalists”, again not predicting the influence the neoconservatives were going to have (Ritchie and Rogers, 2007: 152). Nevertheless, we don’t argue that a complete transition to neo-conservatism took place after 9/11. Only that the neoconservative and assertive nationalist worldviews were brought closer together by the events of 9/11, considering that the two already shared some ideas. Also, that the neoconservative perspective that already existed in the Bush administration found its opportune moment to surface in a moment in which the public, the Congress and President

could resonate with their advanced foreign policy proposition, supported by the Israel lobby (Ritchie and Rogers, 2007: 152-155). In fact, the regime change policy in Iraq would have had limited influence it was only benefiting the neocon group and the Israel lobby. The policy gained support due to the fact that it was embedded in the rhetoric of American nationalism which in a vulnerable time, resonated greatly at the national level (Ahmad, 2014:55).

But why were Cheney and Rumsfeld particularly interested in toppling Saddam's regime? The answer lies in the "demonstration effect", that is, although Saddam Hussein did not represent the biggest threat to America, it would allow to demonstrate US's military power in counteracting any potential threat - not only the grandeur of American power but also its limits. The two were partners in advocating "the strategy of the demonstration effect" (Cruz, 2008, Danner, 2014). Thus, the attack on Iraq "sent a clear message to all violent groups that the US had the will and the power to win the war on terrorism decisively" (Cornwell, 2003). They wanted to make a point by means of pre-emptive attacks and coupled with the neoconservatives' longed desire to remove Saddam turned Iraq in the obvious choice. Also, for Rumsfeld Iraq remained an unfinished business as he was not removed from power during the Gulf War and this represented the time to repair that mistake (Warshaw, 2009: 217). Cheney was described as "the most powerful vice-president in American history" and one of the architects behind the decisions taken by the Bush administration (Cruz, 2008, Reynolds, 2006).

In conclusion, the intrastate level does hold explanatory power in this case. To summarize, we briefly remind the reader some of the key neoconservatives and the roles they played in supporting the attack. Wolfowitz, number two at the Pentagon, was the most ardent neocon advocate for the war and started his advocacy as soon as the immediate aftermath of 9/11 at Camp David, when the top advisors of the administration at the request of the President met to discuss 9/11. Even before, in 1998 he successfully advocated and managed to make regime change in Iraq a priority on the American foreign policy agenda. He was also part of the inner circle of the first meeting at the Pentagon organized to discuss the threat posed by Saddam's regime. At the meeting Perle and Feith were present, together with Ahmed Chalabi (from which came most of the intelligence disregarded by the CIA as being not trustworthy but which formed the basis for the intelligence advanced by the neocons as justifying the war) and Bernard Lewis, the most influential pro-Iraq war intellectual (who influenced greatly Bush, Cheney and Rice emphasizing that the attacks could have been worse with WMD and that Iraq was one of the regime developing them). The meeting left aside members of the State Department and National Security Council. Feith, Under-Secretary of Policy in the Pentagon



was the centre of the informal neocon network that went around the usual interagency channels to make the war on Iraq happen (Halper and Clarke, 2004: 226). Essentially he was in charge of the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group, who provided the dubious intelligence, that later proved cherry-picked and exaggerated. Libby, Cheney's chief of staff also advocated for regime change in Iraq and according to Mearsheimer and Walt represented the most significant influence in changing Cheney's view to agree with the neoconservatives. Libby's views were similar to his mentor's Wolfowitz together with whom he advocated not only for military intervention against Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan but also against the terrorist bases in Iraq and Lebanon.

We argue that the neoconservatives were successful in advancing their views to the ultimate decision makers Bush and Cheney. President Bush, had no foreign policy experience and demonstrated little interest in matters of national security, mostly focusing on domestic politics (Warshaw, 2009: 205). He was thus in need of guidance and facilitated by the assertive nationalists Cheney and Rumsfeld received much help from the neoconservative advisors. The President needed to send a strong signal and respond accordingly to the traumatic events that turned into a national emergency. All of a sudden, the neoconservatives' goal of regime change in Iraq corresponded to the President's need for a powerful response to the unprecedented crisis. The neoconservatives, especially Wolfowitz placed in key positions of the national security apparatus to take advantage of 9/11 managed to direct the attention to Iraq. Also, Rumsfeld saw it as an opportunity to make up for the mistake of leaving Saddam in place during the Gulf War. Regarding Cheney there are mixed data on whether he longed the removal of Saddam before 9/11 or if it just aligned with his nationalist assertive views of flexing military power to demonstrate US's power (Halper and Clarke, 2004: 33,205). Nevertheless, Cheney and Rumsfeld together with the group of neoconservatives managed to establish the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group which provided the intelligence that produced the justification for going to war. The findings of the Group were the basis for briefings regarding the war in the White House and on Capitol Hill. Also, in relation to Cheney it is important to discuss the "one percent doctrine". The one percent doctrine refers to the VP's belief that if there was a one percent chance that states fabricate weapons of mass destruction or that a terrorist attack might be launched on the US then it should be treated as a real threat and counteracted accordingly. Thus legitimizing a pre-emptive military attack from the US. According to Parry this was Cheney's policy philosophy in the run-up to the Iraq attack.

Evidently, the neoconservatives were vital in emphasizing that 1% chance that Saddam is developing WMD in front of Cheney. (Benjamin, 2005; Froomkin, 2006, Parry, 2012).

Another domestic factor that influenced US's decision to go to war was the Israel lobby. In agreement with Mearsheimer and Walt's argument, we consider that the lobby played an important part in persuading American decision makers to go to war. Nevertheless, the role of the neoconservatives and the Israeli influence is rather intertwined. While they had separate roles, many of the neoconservatives had close ties with either the lobby, pro-Israeli organizations or the Israeli leadership. Therefore, we believe that in this case the intra-state considerations were decisive. There was neither a systemic necessity at stake: Iraq was not a challenge to the US unipolar position, neither directly or indirectly. Nor was there an interstate necessity at stake because Israel's security is not tantamount to that of the US and there was no geoeconomic necessity that made the invasion inevitable. Instead, there were intra-US forces: the neoconservatives, the Israel lobby and a crucial misperception about WMD in Iraq. All these factors interacted to create a decision that was against the US national interest and later proved counterproductive. Paradoxically, this is the price of having so much action space, as the US had at the time.

## Discussion

Mouritzen and Wivel's model turned out to be a valuable framework for analysis. We chose to employ the model as we considered it can give a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of foreign policy making. Also, because we assumed that in real life states often take decisions due to influences at different levels which is where the three levels developed in the model can contribute with and allow for a framework for analysis in such a case. While in the present case, only the intrastate level held explanatory power, it is plausible that foreign policy decision making is often a product of influences at different levels and we sought to test whether this was the case in US's decision to invade Iraq.

The insights that can be attributed to the model refer to the fact that due to the complementary aspect of the model we were able to evaluate the foreign policy choice considering the influences the US faced at three levels (systemic, interstate/regional and intrastate or the domestic environment). Although in the present case, one could argue that an analysis intended directly at the domestic level would have been more appropriate, we consider that such an analysis that evaluates the different pressures a state faces can give the reader a fuller and more

nuanced understanding of the situation. Evidently, it is possible that US's decision was also the result of factors unaccounted for that could have explained the choice of war as well.

While we appreciate the focus on parsimony in the model, one could argue that in case the systemic level would have provided an explanation alone, then we would have not gone down the explanatory ladder and we might have overlooked important interstate and intrastate factors. Such an analysis could have brought to light factors that actually reinforced the systemic level, thus providing a more nuanced and thorough analysis or that could have equally well explained the foreign policy decision. Or if we were to go down the explanatory ladder we would have realized that part of the decision could also be attributed to a different level. Even if we were to lose parsimony, we might have gained explanatory power and one could argue that a more thorough analysis and response is more important than finding the simplest explanation. However this is a limitation that is accepted and acknowledged by the two authors. While we consider this a limitation of the model, in the present case this was not relevant, as the systemic level could have not provided an explanation alone and we had to explore all three levels to explain the choice of military attack.

In accordance with the luxury theory, the domestic factors played the biggest role when they were allowed to by external factors. This is precisely the case in 2003 when the US was the sole superpower and could do whatever it wanted. Consequently, the intrastate factors played the biggest role in the foreign policy decision more precisely the group of neoconservatives that could influence the decision making process in a direction that aligned with their interests. The group was aided by what was called many times, the most effective lobby group in Washington, the Israel lobby and the "opportune" moment from 9/11.

We finish this section by presenting the limitations of the paper. Firstly, as we started with a theoretical model in mind, the analysis will evidently be limited to the considerations of the theories employed. Secondly, specific theories were employed at each of the three levels. In case other theories or approaches would have been employed, a different conclusion of the thesis might have been reached. Thirdly, at the intrastate level, there could have been different approaches we could have taken- for example focus on the lessons of the past that might have affected the decision makers and thus the way they reacted to the "threat" posed by Iraq. Such a comprehensive model, could have taken different angles into account – which represents its strength, but also its weakness. However, we consider that the approaches considered for each of the levels, were most appropriate, considering our present knowledge on the topic.

## Conclusion

Briefly, we summarize the findings of the present thesis. In trying to answer the research question “*Why did the United States invade Iraq?*” we analyzed the influences the US faced at three levels according to the framework of foreign policy analysis. At the systemic level, Iraq did not pose a threat to US’s national security as it did not hold WMD nor had links to the terrorist group Al-Qaeda linked to the attacks from 9/11. Also, in 2003 the regime did not represent a threat to US’s position in the international system or to the principles of the unipolar world order. Iraq’s power compared to US’s in terms of population, territory, economy, and military was low and could not be considered a challenger to US’s hegemonic position. Moreover, the principles of the unipolar world were not affected by the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein as the global support for the principles of the “free world” was high in most countries from the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe.

At the interstate level, we found no geopolitical considerations that would make the military attack necessary. Although Iraq represented a threat to Israel, America’s most important ally in the Middle East, according to the model we could only expect a military attack if it affected US’s security directly. However, Israel’s security is not tantamount to that of US and it wasn’t in US’s advantage to act on Israel’s behalf as a threat to Israel from Saddam’s regime was not to affect US directly. Also, there was no geoeconomic (oil) incentive at stake as an attack on the country was to destabilize global oil prices which in turn would affect the world economy, thus not in US’s interest.

Lastly, the intrastate state peculiarities explain US’s attack on Iraq. In order to understand US’s foreign policy choice we have to understand the domestic environment in which the decisions were taken. The neoconservatives who as described above occupied important positions in Bush’s administration were long preoccupied with removing Saddam Hussein from power and replacing it with a leader that would better serve American and Israeli interests in the region. They were not only interested in changing the leadership in Iraq, but rather this was only the beginning of the regional transformation of many rogue regimes in the Middle East. The events from September 2001 together with the fabricated intelligence regarding the operational links between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda and the regime’s plan to develop WMD allowed the neoconservatives to advance their hawkish plans and get the support of ultimate decision makers and the public. However, as described above 9/11 represented the turning point and the neoconservatives who had a well-developed network in the White House,

Pentagon and media were able to use the moment and advance their preferred policies regarding Iraq. Also, as a result of the pre-war political debates started by the neoconservatives it allowed for domestic interest groups such as the influential Israel Lobby to direct their influence and push the public debate in a direction which would favour Israel. The connection between key officials in the administration and Israel can be seen in the fact that the top officials Perle, Wolfowitz and Feith were under FBI investigation at various points on suspicion of spying for Israel (Ahmad, 2014: 55).

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