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Much pain, little gain : the consequences of the Iraq War for Iraqis and Americans

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ARTICLES

A NEW MIDDLE EAST?

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PAIN, LITTLE GAIN: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE IRAQ WAR FOR IRAQIS AND AMERICANS

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to provide details about contemporary reality in Iraq and the impact of the American invasion on Iraq and American interests in the ten years since 2003. The analysis of the various source material, including survey results, policy statements, and statistical data reveals that, while the invasion brought gains to both the Iraqis and the Americans, it did so at a great cost. The assessment of the outcome of that invasion is complicated by the fact that contemporary Iraq was influenced by two decades of the rule of Saddam Hussein, who dominated the government and repressed his real and imagined foes. In March 2003 the US hoped for a quick win; however, its troops were to remain in Iraq until December 2011, giving it significant influence throughout this period. While ten years have passed since the invasion, only ten years have passed and that may not be an adequate time frame in which to identify and evaluate gains and losses.

Key words

Iraq, America, democracy, Islam, Middle East

Ten years have passed since the American invasion of Iraq and one year has passed since the withdrawal of the last American troops from that country, so early 2013 provides a timely opportunity to assess the consequences of that invasion for the Iraqis, the Americans, and the American strategic interests. This study examines those questions, the answers to which are much debated. On the question of whether the invasion advanced America's interests, for instance, former President George W. Bush has no doubt, writing in his memoirs that, "For all the difficulties that followed, America is safer without a homicidal dictator pursuing WMD and supporting terror at the heart of the Middle East." Retired General William Odom, former head of the National Security Agency, has a very different view, describing the invasion as "the greatest strategic disaster in American history."¹ As to the question about what the Americans left in Iraq when they departed, Ned Parker, who reported from that country prior to the American withdrawal, writes that it "has become something close to a failed state... The dream of an Iraq governed by elected leaders answerable to the people is rapidly fading away." In contrast, Anthony J. Blinken, a Deputy Assistant to President Obama, argues that Iraq has made "clear, measurable progress in the few short years since it lurched to the brink of sectarian war." While the country has much to do, its progress in the last three years has been "remarkable"; it is "less violent, more democratic, and more prosperous than at any time in recent history."²

To assess these issues, this study provides details about contemporary reality in Iraq and what has changed there since 2003 as well as considers the impact of the war on America's strategic interests. It will conclude that, while the invasion brought gains to both Iraqis and Americans, it did so at great cost, probably too great a cost, for both. This conclusion must be preliminary and tentative, however. While ten years have passed since the invasion, *only* ten years have passed and that may not be an adequate time frame in which to identify and evaluate gains and losses. Moreover, contemporary Iraq was influenced by two decades of Saddam Hussein's rule prior to the American invasion, so assignment of praise and blame for the contemporary reality is not completely straightforward.

¹ T. Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, New York 2011, pp. 190, 234.

² N. Parker, *The Iraq We Left Behind*, "Foreign Affairs" March/April 2012; A. Blinken, *Morning in Mesopotamia*, "Foreign Affairs" July/August 2012.

1. Context

Any understanding of contemporary Iraq must take account of two earlier periods in the country's history. It had had a "tumultuous quarter-century under the leadership of Saddam Hussein," the dominant figure from 1979 to 2003.³ Then, Saddam's regime was overthrown by the American invasion of March 2003, something that "exacted an enormous toll on Iraq's citizens."⁴ Saddam's armies invaded two of the country's neighbours, Iran and Kuwait, fighting the first war to an inconclusive outcome and losing the second to an American-led international coalition. As many as 200,000 Iraqis may have died in the war with Iran, and perhaps 25,000 more in the occupation and war with Kuwait. When, following Iraq's defeat in Kuwait, the country's Shiite and Kurdish populations rose up in rebellion, Saddam's retaliation led to the death of as many as 50,000 Shiites, while perhaps as many as two million Kurds fled the country to Turkey and Iran.

At home, Saddam dominated the government and repressed his real and imagined foes. Freedom House's 2003 report on the human rights situation in the country noted that Iraq might be "the most oppressive state in the world." It had long judged Iraq to be "not free" and consistently assigned the lowest possible scores on both civil liberties and political rights. There was virtually no freedom of expression or assembly, the majority Shia population faced severe persecution, there were arbitrary arrests and torture was common. Socioeconomic conditions deteriorated, especially in the 1990s. Iraq's ranking on the Human Development Index declined from 55 to 126 (of 174) in the 1990s, a result of wars and UN sanctions imposed after the 1991 war. UNICEF reported that 500,000 Iraqi children under five died between 1991–1998.⁵ It will take years to overcome these conditions and to overcome the political legacy of the Saddam Hussein years, "a culture of deep suspicion coupled with a winner-take-all and loser lose-all form of politics."⁶

³ *The Failed States Index: Country Profiles, Iraq*, Fund for Peace, p. 3, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=states-iraq>.

⁴ *At a Crossroads: Human Rights in Iraq Eight Years after the U.S.-Led Invasion*, Human Rights Watch, p. 1, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/02/21/crossroads>.

⁵ *Freedom in the World 2003*, Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2003/Iraq>.

⁶ *Déjà vu All Over Again? Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis*, International Crisis Group, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/126-deja-vu-all-over-again-iraqs-escalating-political-crisis.aspx>.

The March 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq also had a great impact. While the US hoped for a quick win, its troops were to remain in Iraq until December 2011, giving it significant influence throughout this period. While total blame for the problems in Iraq in recent years cannot be assigned solely to the United States, it certainly contributed to them. The US had invaded, after all, and occupied the country for eight years, and as Secretary of State Colin Powell noted prior to the invasion, “when you take out a regime and you bring down a government, you become the government.”⁷

The US occupation lasted as long as it did due to significant and continuing political and military problems in Iraq, an indication of its inability to establish a secure and stable Iraq, with all the attendant consequences for the Iraqis. Thus, the initial plan to turn power over to the Iraqis, primarily to the Iraqi exiles, and to leave the country in six months was abandoned within six weeks. Widespread violence and widespread Iraqi disapproval of the leaders chosen by the Americans led the Americans to reverse course completely in May 2003 and to rule the country directly through the Coalition Provisional Authority, a role planned to last as long as five years. That plan also met Iraqi resistance and increased the political and economic costs for the American occupying forces. Consequently, it was decided in November 2003, merely six months later, to turn power over to an Iraqi government. The transfer of political authority occurred in June 2004, but thousands of US troops remained in the country, giving it significant influence, but not enough to halt the continuing and escalating violence, leading to another change in US military policy in late 2006, to counterinsurgency, i.e., an effort to protect Iraq citizens rather than fixed points and to engage in political-military efforts to win their loyalties. This policy worked in the sense that there was a dramatic decline in violence; however, the Iraqi government remained indecisive and sectarian tensions remained.⁸ Americans’ influence declined as the date for their final departure approached. Failure to get the Iraqis to agree to a power-sharing agreement after the 2010 election or to a continued American troop presence resulted in “an Iraq that is less stable domestically and less reliable internationally than the United States had envisioned.”⁹

⁷ D. Samuels, *A Conversation with Colin Powell*, “Atlantic Magazine” April 2007.

⁸ T. Anderson, *Bush’s Wars*, op.cit.; A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, New Haven 2007; C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, New York 2007.

⁹ M. Gordon, *In US Exit from Iraq, Failed Efforts and Challenges*, “New York Times” September 22, 2012.

2. Gains and Pains for Iraqis

How have the lives of the Iraqis changed in the decade since the American invasion? Are they better off than they were in 2003? Individual Iraqis will have different answers to these questions. What follows is evidence they might use to reach those individual assessments.

The greatest single gain for the Iraqis has been the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Few lament his passing. There is a new, American-influenced constitution that was (barely) endorsed in a national referendum in October 2005. Two parliamentary elections, generally regarded as free and fair, were held in December 2005 and March 2010, and turnout was high, especially in the first election, when 75% of the public voted. Still, Freedom House argues in its most recent report that “Iraq is not an electoral democracy”: while it had conducted “meaningful elections” in March 2010, “political participation and decision-making in the country remain seriously impaired by sectarian and insurgent violence, widespread corruption, and the influence of foreign powers.”¹⁰

That same Freedom House report demonstrates that there has been some improvement in human rights conditions. Most political rights and civil liberties are guaranteed by the constitution, although their exercise is hindered by violence and fear. For instance, while freedom of expression is protected by the constitution, “in practice it has been seriously impeded by sectarian tensions and fear of violent reprisals.” Iraq’s score on the Press Freedom Index, to cite one example, decreased from 124 (of 166) in 2003 to 152 (of 178) in 2012, due to “an increase in intimidation and violence against journalists.” There are no restrictions on the operation of non-governmental organizations, although these, too, have seen their operations restricted by safety concerns. This is a change since 2002, when the exercise of civil liberties was restricted by the government and not by societal conditions. The Iraqis have far more sources of information in 2012 than they did in 2002. More than a dozen independent television stations and hundreds of print publications have been established, and the number of Internet subscribers increased from a pre-war level of 4,500 to more than 1.5 million by January 2010. Criminal justice practices have not changed as dramatically. Security services still engage in arbitrary arrests and the use of torture continues, especially in security-related cases, and the judiciary is not independent. Given these changes, Freedom House still characterized Iraq

¹⁰ *Freedom in the World 2012*, Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/iraq>.

as “not free” in 2012 and assigned scores of 6 (of 7) for civil liberties and 5 (of 7) for political rights, better than the consistent ratings of 7 in the Saddam Hussein years. This is an improvement, but only a modest improvement, especially compared with the changes elsewhere resulting from the Arab Spring. Tunisia’s Freedom House rating, for instance, went from “not free” in 2011 to “partly free” in 2012, with its political rights score improving from 7 to 3 and its civil liberties score improving from 5 to 4.¹¹

Whatever the character of its institutional structure, the Iraqi government does not operate efficiently. A July 2012 report by the International Crisis Group described it as “weak,” “dysfunctional,” “divided,” and “drifting.”¹² It took nine months following the 2010 elections to form a government, and since that time Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has increased the power of his office, e.g. by gaining control over nominally independent bodies and appointing allies to temporary positions rather than seeking parliamentary approval for permanent occupants. The divided opposition has protested and threatened a vote of confidence but has been unable to do so due to internal divisions and the self-interest of some of its members. Given these internal divisions and resulting weakness, no Iraqi government has been able to pass laws on oil exploration or the distribution of oil revenues, the environment, consumer protection, intellectual property, investment, or permanent rules for de-Baathification.¹³

The government has failed in other ways, too, and the quality of life for ordinary Iraqis remains poor. Broad measures of conditions in the country can be found in the *State Fragility Index* published by the Center for Systemic Peace and the *Failed States Index* published by the Fund for Peace. Iraq ranked 16th (of 164 countries, with 1 being the most fragile) on the State Fragility Index in 2011, a ranking that placed it into the “high fragility” category. Security and economic effectiveness were identified as particular problems. The 2012 Failed States Index ranked Iraq 9th (of 177 countries, with 1 being the most failed state). Iraq ranked among the world’s worst ten countries on five of the index’s twelve components: “group grievance” (ethnic violence, discrimination, powerlessness), “security

¹¹ *Freedom in the World 2012*, Freedom House; *At a Crossroads*, Human Rights Watch; *Iraq Index (January 31, 2012): Tracking the Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Brookings, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Centers/saban/iraq%20index/index20120131.PDF>.

¹² *Deja Vu All Over Again?*, International Crisis Group, pp. 10, 16.

¹³ *Ibidem*; K. Katzman, *Iraq: Governance, Politics, and Human Rights*, “Congressional Reference Service” December 13, 2012, pp. 13–14, 25, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21968.pdf>.

apparatus” (internal conflict, small arms proliferation, political prisoners), “human flight” (migration per capita, emigration of educated population), “fractionalized elites” (deadlock and brinkmanship for political gain), and “uneven development” (large gaps between rich and poor and/or urban and rural areas). The Failed States Index is also useful because it tracks changes over time. This longer-term perspective provides evidence that conditions in Iraq have improved in recent years, although modestly: while still very low, its 2012 scores on eight of the twelve components of the index had improved from 2011 and, over a five-year period, had improved on seven of the 12 components.¹⁴

Terms such as “failed state” or “fragile state” suggest a government that is unable or unwilling to complete the tasks expected of all governments. The most fundamental failure of the Iraqi government and the Americans before it has been the failure to protect the lives of the Iraqis. Iraq Body Count documented 116,497 civilian deaths from the time of the American invasion in 2003 until its withdrawal in 2011. Using WikiLeaks revelations, Iraq Body Count estimates that as many as 15,000 more Iraqi civilians may have been killed. The situation has improved in recent years in the sense that fewer civilians are being killed: the number of civilian deaths was slightly more than 4,000 in both 2010 and 2011, declines from the height of the violence in 2006–2008. In fact, 90% of all civilian deaths occurred by 2009. Not only did the number of deaths decrease, but the number of the Iraqis killed by the Americans also declined. Approximately 13% of those killed were killed by American soldiers, especially in the first several weeks after the invasion; here, too, there has been improvement, with the number killed by American soldiers declining greatly after 2009, with only 32 Iraqi civilians killed in 2010 and 19 in 2011. Following the American withdrawal, however, the level of violence increased. Two attacks by terrorist groups in January 2012 killed 131 people, and overall, 2012 was the most violent year since 2009.¹⁵

Another government failure is the inability to provide public services to all citizens and regions. The Iraq Knowledge Network, part of the government’s Planning Ministry, conducted a survey on the availability of public services in first quarter of 2011. It found that, with respect to electricity, households receive

¹⁴ M. Marshall, B. Cole, *Global Report 2011: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, “Center for Systematic Peace”, p. 30, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/GlobalReport2011.pdf>; *The Failed States Index 2012*, Fund for Peace, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi; Country Profile: Iraqi>, Fund for Peace.

¹⁵ *Civilian Deaths from Violence in 2012*, Iraq Body Count, <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2012/>; K. Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, op.cit., pp. 19–20.

an average of 14.6 hours of electricity per day from public and private sources. The public water network provides 25% of its users with less than two hours of water per day. Only thirty percent of households, mostly in urban areas, have access to the public sanitation system, and only 52% of households have access to solid waste collection services.¹⁶

Examination of macroeconomic factors provides further evidence that, despite recent improvements, the situation remains poor. The country's nominal GDP increased from \$13.6 billion in 2003 to \$128.1 billion in 2011 and per capita GDP increased from \$802 to \$3808 in the same period. These are dramatic improvements, although some of the gains have been eaten up by inflation – which has been kept in check in recent years – and by corruption, which has gotten worse: Iraq's ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Index declined from 113 (of 133 countries) in 2003 to 175 (of 183 countries) in 2011. The oil industry remains the economic lifeblood of the country, responsible for 90% of government revenue and 80% of foreign exchange earnings. Unfortunately for the Iraqis, production has barely increased since before the American invasion, although revenues have increased as a result of increased oil process. Production has only increased from a pre-war estimate of 2.5 million barrels per day to 2.89 million barrels per day in April 2012 and exports have increased, maybe, from pre-war estimates of 1.75–2.5 million barrels per day to 2.4 million in June 2012. Unemployment remains high, about 20% nationwide, but is as high as 55% in some rural areas.¹⁷

There are continuing social problems. The UN Development Program's Human Development Index, based on life expectancy at birth, access to knowledge, and standard of living, ranked Iraq 132nd of 187 countries in 2011 and placed it in the “medium development” category. The country made progress between 2000–2011 on education measures and on standard of living measures, but life expectancy at birth was lower in 2011 than in 2000 or 1995. Average life expectancy in 2011 was 69 years and mean years of schooling for those over 25 was 5.6 years.¹⁸ The large number of refugees and internally displaced persons

¹⁶ *Essential Services Factsheet*, Iraq Knowledge Network, <http://www.iauiraq.org/documents/1583/ServicesFactsheet-English.pdf>.

¹⁷ *World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>; *Iraq Index (July 2012)*, Brookings; *Freedom in the World 2012*, Freedom House.

¹⁸ *Human Development Report 2011: Sustainable and Equity: A Better Future for All*, United Nations Development Program, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2011/download/>.

create additional social problems. Approximately one million people were displaced or had fled the country prior to the American invasion and another 2.7 million were displaced by April 2010. More than 400,000 of those who fled have returned to their homes since 2009. While that is good news, a 2010 survey of returnees indicated that 87% could not make enough to care for their families and 61% regretted returning.¹⁹

One gain for the Iraqis since 2003 is that they feel freer to express opinions about their conditions. Only 7% believed they were “thriving” according to a September 2011 Gallup poll, while 25% believed they were “suffering.” Conditions appear to be getting worse: in response to the same question eighteen months earlier, 16% reported they were thriving and 14% that they were suffering. Seventy percent of respondents in September 2011 reported feelings of stress the previous day and 60% reported experiencing anger. One likely source of anger and stress is the standard of living. In February 2010, 46% were satisfied with their standard of living and 49% dissatisfied. Here, too, conditions appear to be worsening: eighteen months later, in August 2011, there was more dissatisfaction: 32% reported being satisfied and 64% dissatisfied.²⁰

Many Iraqis held the US responsible for their condition, especially in the years immediately following the invasion. A September 2003 Gallup poll indicated that only 5% of Iraqis believed the United States had invaded to “assist the Iraqi people” and only 1% believed it had done so to bring democracy to the country. On the other hand, 94% believed Baghdad was “a more dangerous place than before the invasion.” Opinion improved little over the course of America’s direct rule: a Coalition Provisional Authority-sponsored poll conducted near the end of the occupation revealed that 85% of Iraqis lacked confidence in the CPA. Opinions about the United States did not improve much over the next several years. Asked “Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of the United States?” fewer than 40% of Iraqis approved in any year after 2008: 35% in 2008, 24% in 2009, 36% in 2010, and 29% in 2011.²¹

¹⁹ *Iraq Index (January 31, 2012)*, Brookings.

²⁰ ‘Suffering’ in Iraq Highest since 2008, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151940/suffering-iraq-highest-2008.aspx>; *Opinion Briefing: Discontent and Division in Iraq*, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153128/opinion-briefing-discontent-division-iraq.aspx>.

²¹ D. Jervis, *Mugged by Reality: The American Experience in Iraq*, “South African Journal of International Affairs” 2009, No. 16; *The U.S. Global Leadership Project*, Meridian International Center and Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153959/Global-Leadership-Project.aspx>.

3. Gains and Pains for Americans

For Americans, too, the Iraq war brought some gains but much pain as well. The biggest gain was the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Yet this gain must be qualified in two ways. Some argue that Saddam was not all that threatening. Iraq's military had been degraded since the first Gulf War, it did not possess weapons of mass destruction as Americans had believed, and few of its neighbours, the ones presumably most threatened by it, supported the invasion. Also, any threat posed by Iraq might have been contained through a combination of UN sanctions and British and American air power. That is, the threat that was eliminated by the American invasion might have been dealt with, or was already being dealt with, by less painful policies.

To achieve Saddam's removal, America and Americans experienced a lot of pain. The most obvious are the costs in lives and dollars. The Defense Department reported that 4,487 American soldiers were killed in Iraq between March 19, 2003 and December 31, 2011 and another 32,223 were wounded.²² In terms of expenditures, the Congressional Research Service reported in March 2011 that Congress had appropriated \$806 billion for the war in Iraq. Expenditures have undoubtedly increased since then, although probably not too dramatically as US troop numbers have declined. That spending has had an adverse impact on the American economy, and the United States will be paying an economic price for years. Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, and Linda J. Bilmes, a lecturer in public finance at Harvard's Kennedy School, estimate that the war's ultimate cost (including government spending and the adverse impact on the American economy) will be more than \$3 trillion. Why? Because the war added at least \$25 to the cost of a barrel of oil coming to the US, was responsible for at least 25% of the increase in America's growing debt burden, and, because low interest rates and lax regulations – necessary to keep the domestic economy growing while the war continued – contributed to a worsening of the financial crisis.²³

One human and economic cost that will last long after the last American soldier leaves Iraq is the treatment of those who were physically and emotionally

²² *Iraq Index (December 31, 2011)*, Brookings.

²³ A. Velasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*, "Congressional Research Service" March 29, 2011, p. 1, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf>; J. Stiglitz, L. Bilmes, *The True Cost of the Iraq War: \$3 Trillion and Beyond*, "Washington Post" September 10, 2010.

wounded there. These costs follow all wars, but will likely be higher in the case of the Iraq (and Afghanistan) war for several reasons. One is that more soldiers wounded in the current wars are surviving their injuries (90%) than did so in Vietnam (86%) or earlier wars. In addition, more veterans are reporting injuries: forty-five percent of returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan are filing claims, a far higher rate than in the World War II or Vietnam eras, and as many 20% are reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Finally, more veterans are seeking help from the Veterans Administration because they do not have private health insurance. If previous wars, in which the highest costs for treating veterans occurred thirty to forty years after the conflict ended, are any guide, disability and treatment expenses for veterans will become a huge item in the federal budget. The Congressional Budget Office has predicted an increase in costs from \$1.9 billion in 2010 to as much as \$8.4 billion in 2020. Looking to the more distant future, some private groups estimate that treatment and disability costs will amount to as much as \$1 trillion over the next forty years.²⁴

A further problem is that not all of the money spent in Iraq was spent wisely or for the purpose it was intended, reducing its impact on Iraq while increasing costs to Americans. Writing in February 2009, Stuart Bowen Jr., the Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, concluded that expenditures on Iraqi infrastructure projects between the summer of 2002 and late 2008 generally did not meet their goals, although expenditures to increase the capabilities of the Iraqi military did. There was a “significant waste of taxpayer dollars,” however, contrary to public perceptions, relatively few examples of outright fraud.²⁵ It was not just American money that was misspent or spent poorly. The US has been unable to account for more than \$7 billion in Iraqi assets from the UN’s Development Fund for Iraq. This fund includes assets left over from the UN’s Oil-for-Food program that were to be distributed by the US to help reconstruct the country. Poor bookkeeping rather than fraud is perhaps the reason for this failure, but the Iraqis are likely to insist that some of their money be returned.²⁶

All wars cost money and lives. The more relevant question is whether the outcome of a war justified its costs. World War II, for example, was far more

²⁴ J. Dao, *Cost of Treating Veterans Will Rise Long Past Wars*, “New York Times” July 27, 2011; *The Paperwork Mountain at Veterans Affairs*, “New York Times” 23 November 2012.

²⁵ *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience (2009)*, Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, http://www.sigir.mil/files/HardLessons/Hard_Lessons_Report.pdf#view=fit.

²⁶ J. Rogin, *U.S. Can’t Produce \$1 Billion of Fuel Receipts in Iraq*, Foreign Policy, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>.

costly in terms of both lives and dollars than the war in Iraq, but few would argue that those sacrifices were not worth making. What distinguishes the war in Iraq from many previous ones America has fought is the large number of strategic costs in addition to lives and dollars. The most significant such cost is that “it dramatically shifted the regional balance of power in Iran’s favour,” according to Safa al-Sheik, Iraq’s deputy national security adviser.²⁷ Iraq’s military arsenal was bigger than Iran’s in 2002, with more tanks, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, and surface-to-air missile launchers, but by 2010 it was Iran that possessed more of each. The Iranian military manpower advantage increased from a ratio of 5:4 to 5:2 in those years.²⁸ Details such as these do not account for the quality of military equipment or the morale of troops, but they do demonstrate a significant erosion of any regional counterbalance to Iran.

The US invasion may also have limited America’s ability to confront Iran. While American strategists might have hoped that the presence of US troops in Afghanistan as well as Iraq would place great pressure on Iran, the opposite turned out to be true, i.e., because Americans were tied down in both countries, America’s ability to pressure Iran was reduced and Iran’s ability to retaliate to any American strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities was increased. Furthermore, questions about America’s intelligence capabilities and the erosion of its position in the world, to be discussed below, contributed to less international attention and pressure on Iran and its nuclear program than would otherwise have been the case.

The Shia Iran also benefitted because of its increased influence in the Shia Iraq. The two governments are increasing cooperation, especially on security matters, and have greatly enhanced trade and tourism ties. Iran played an important role in mediating Iraq’s political crisis following the 2010 elections and has ties with important Iraqi political and security forces.²⁹ This can be illustrated in the current struggle in Syria, Iran’s most important Arab ally. A September 2012 intelligence report claimed that Iraq has been allowing Iran to funnel “personnel and tens of tons of weapons” through Iraqi airspace and into Syria “on almost a daily basis.” There have been reports that buses carrying Iranian pilgrims to

²⁷ S. al-Sheik, E. Sky, *Is Iraq an Iranian Proxy?*, Foreign Policy, www.foreignpolicy.com.

²⁸ A. Cordesman, S. Khazi, *Iraq After US Withdrawal: US Policy and the Iraqi Search for Security and Stability*, “Center for Strategic and International Studies”, p. 4, <http://csis.org/publication/iraq-after-us-withdrawal>.

²⁹ *Déjà vu All Over Again?*, International Crisis Group, pp. 10–12; A. Cordesman, S. Khazi, *Iraq After U.S. Withdrawal*, p. VII.

a Shiite shrine in Syria have also carried weapons, supplies and fighters to aid the embattled Syrian regime. The US has urged the Iraqi government to slow or halt the supplies going to Syria, e.g. by inspecting planes on their way to Syria, but it has rarely done so: only two flights to Syria have been inspected since September 2012, the last on October 27. There is also evidence that Iranians were alerted to the inspections by Iraqi officials.³⁰

How about terrorism, the reduction of which was one of the purposes of the war? The invasion might be deemed a strategic success if looking merely at the terrorist threat to the US. According to the Global Terrorism Index, its ranking on the list of countries experiencing the “highest impact of terrorism” dropped from 1 to 41 between 2002–11. The terrorist threat to Iraq, in contrast, has increased dramatically. Fully one-third of victims of terrorism in the decade after 2002 were Iraqi and it had the highest score on the “impact of terrorism” measure. Overall the global number of terrorist incidents increased 460% between 2002–2011, although most of that increase occurred between 2002–2007. Examination of the number of fatalities and injuries yields similar results. Fatalities increased 195% between 2002–2011 and the number of injuries increased 224%, although there has been a decline in both since 2009.³¹

One strategic consequence of the war in Iraq (and Afghanistan) is likely to be a reduced public willingness to be active on the world scene. After the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the US public “developed a strong aversion to embarking on such ventures again,” according to John Mueller, an expert on public opinion during conflicts, and he predicts similar consequences following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.³² There is already evidence of such views emerging. The 2012 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey found that just 61% of the American public believed it would be best for America to take an active role in the world, down ten points since 2002, while 38% believed it would be best for the country to stay out of foreign affairs, up from 25% in 2002 and the highest level recorded since the question was first asked in 1947. Perhaps most worrisome for the future is that it is young people, those aged 18–29, who are most likely to support a reduced American role. Americans want the US to reduce its global presence,

³⁰ N. Younis, *Time to Get Tough on Iraq*, “New York Times” October 30, 2012; M. Gordon, E. Schmitt, T. Arango, *Flow of Arms to Syria Through Iraq Persists, to U.S. Dismay*, “New York Times” December 1, 2012.

³¹ 2012 *Global Terrorism Index: Capturing the Impact of Terrorism in the Last Decade*, Institute of Economics and Peace, <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/2012-Global-Terrorism-Index-Report1.pdf>.

³² J. Mueller, *The Iraq Syndrome*, “Foreign Affairs” November/December 2005.

too: 52% believe the US should have the same number of overseas military bases as it does today, the lowest percentage since 2002, and 38% believe it should have fewer, up from just 14% in 2002.

None of this should be taken to mean that the American public is isolationist or does not want any involvement in the world. Rather, it is calling for a change in foreign policy methods, emphasizing non-military solutions to problems and a very selective use of military force.³³ President Obama's use of military power reflects these views. He has been willing to use US military power in response to direct threats, but to do so "in a targeted, get-in-and-get-out fashion that avoids, at all costs, the kind of messy ground wars and lengthy occupations that have drained America's treasury and spirit for the past decades." Examples of the Obama approach include the use of drones against al-Qaeda operatives and the use of computer viruses against Iranian nuclear program computers.³⁴

Another adverse consequence of the invasion is the deterioration of America's global reputation in both the short-term and long-term. This can be illustrated in Pew Global opinion polls. There was a consistent and often dramatic decline in America's "favourability rating" in Europe between 2002 and 2003, i.e., at the time the US was deciding to invade Iraq: from 62% to 42% in France, 60% to 45% in Germany, and 71% to 45% in the Czech Republic. European support for the US remained low for the remainder of the Bush presidency and, although it has increased in the Obama years, it has generally not returned to pre-war levels. The erosion of support for the US declined even more dramatically in the Middle East in the short term and remains low. In Turkey, for example, the 30% favourability rating in 2003 declined to 15% in 2003 and was still at that level in 2012. In Jordan, support deteriorated from 25% in 2002 to just 1% in 2003 and was just 12% in 2012. While Pakistani support for the US actually increased between 2002 and 2012, it did so from a very low base, 10% in 2002 to 12% in 2012.³⁵

³³ *Foreign Policy in the New Millennium: Results of the 2012 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/Task%20Force%20Reports/2012_CCS_Report.pdf.

³⁴ D. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and the Surprising Use of American Power*, New York 2012, pp. XIV–XV.

³⁵ *Global Opinion of Obama Slips, International Policies Faulted*, Pew Global Attitudes Project, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/06/13/chapter-1-views-of-the-u-s-and-american-foreign-policy-4/>.

The decline in America's favourability rating probably resulted as much from the flawed rationale for the invasion of Iraq as the invasion, itself. The Center for Public Integrity published a report in January 2008 identifying "at least" 935 false statements about the threat posed by Iraq in the two years following September 11, 2001. The President made 232 false statements about weapons of mass destruction and 28 false statements about Iraqi links to al-Qaeda. Secretary of State Colin Powell made 254 false claims, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld – 109 false claims, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz – 85, National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice – 56, and Vice President Dick Cheney – 48. This was part of an "orchestrated campaign that effectively galvanized public opinion and, in the process, led the nation to war under decidedly false pretences," that the officials knew or had reason to know were false.³⁶ To cite but one piece of evidence that the administration overreached in its depiction of an Iraq with nuclear weapons, George Tenet, who, himself, later exaggerated the Iraqi threat, acknowledged in his memoirs that claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction "went far beyond what our analysis could support. The intelligence community's belief was that, left unchecked, Iraq would probably not acquire nuclear weapons until near the end of the decade."³⁷

Americans recognize the pain caused by the war and have become very critical of it. Two-thirds of respondents in a 2012 survey said the war in Iraq had not been worth it, the highest percentage since the war started, while just 32% said the war was worth it, the lowest percentage since 2003. Americans recognize the adverse strategic consequences of invading Iraq: 71% of respondents in the same poll said the Iraq war demonstrated that caution should be used when contemplating military force, 70% believed the war had worsened America's relations with the Muslim world, while 69% doubted that the war had reduced the threat of terrorism. Given these conclusions, it is not surprising that 51% of respondents in a poll taken at the time of the final troop departure from Iraq believed that the decision to send troops there had been a "dumb" one. Nor is there much faith that the situation in Iraq will improve: 63% believed it was unlikely that the Iraqi government would be able to prevent terrorists from using its territory to plan attacks against the United States, 60% doubted the

³⁶ C. Lewis, M. Reading-Smith, *False Pretenses: Following 9/11, President Bush and Seven Top Officials of His Administration Waged a Carefully Orchestrated Campaign of Misinformation about Saddam Hussein's Iraq*, "Center for Public Integrity" January 23, 2008, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2008/01/23/5641/false-pretenses>.

³⁷ Quoted in T. Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, p. 113.

country would be able to preserve its own safety without American help, and 54% doubted the country would be able to preserve a democratic government.³⁸

4. Conclusions

One clear conclusion of this study is that the Americans and the Iraqis have both experienced significant pain since the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. Almost all of the pain for Americans – deaths, adverse economic consequences, and others – can be attributed directly to the decision to go to war and poor planning for the post-war period. For the Iraqis, the causal relationship between the invasion and subsequent hardship is not so clear. Nonetheless, one can argue that the number of deaths, political instability, and socioeconomic hardships after 2003 were greater than they would have been had the US not invaded.

Were those pains worth it? Americans will likely answer “no,” if only because there were so few gains from the invasion. Yes, Saddam Hussein was removed from power, but the costs were great. Consider the standard used by Dick Cheney, then the Secretary of Defense, at the end of the first Gulf War when the US did not invade Iraq: noting that only 146 Americans had died in the war, he asked “how many additional dead Americans is Saddam worth? Our judgment was, not very many...”³⁹ More than thirty times as many Americans died in the second Gulf War, and the results were more ambiguous. These, along with all the other costs make it hard to conclude that the invasion was worth it.

Unlike the Americans, the Iraqis had more gains from the invasion. Saddam Hussein was removed from power; the human rights situation improved somewhat; Iraq is unlikely to threaten its neighbours, although it may face greater threats from them; the socioeconomic situation has improved; and elections have been held. Are these gains worth the costs? While individual Iraqis will have different answers, an outsider might generalize that the Shiites would be more likely to answer affirmatively and the Sunnis negatively. For the Shiites, not only did the invasion remove Saddam, whose regime had persecuted them severely, but was followed by a Shia-dominated government. Reduced tension with Iran not only reduces the danger of foreign invasion but create

³⁸ Gallup/ORC Opinion Poll (December 16–18, 2011), Polling Report, <http://pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>; *Foreign Policy in the New Millennium*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

³⁹ Cheney quoted in T. Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, op.cit., p. 39.

opportunities for the Iraqi Shiites to visit religious centres in Iran. For these reasons, the Iraq Sunnis, who lost their long-dominant position in society, are more likely to conclude that the post-invasion gains are not worth the pain they have experienced. The political position of the Iraqi Kurds is largely unchanged; they have had *de facto* autonomy since the first Gulf War, although that status has now been inserted into the Iraqi constitution. They may have special reason to be thankful for Saddam's demise, however, given that he launched a genocide against the Kurdish population in the late 1980s.

This study has concentrated on the impact of the American invasion on Iraq and American interests in the ten years since 2003. Are its conclusions premature? Should Americans and Iraqis take a longer term perspective with regard to changes in that country? Ryan Crocker, a former American ambassador, has argued that they should because the "Iraq story post-2003, is still chapter one. This is a very long book."⁴⁰ Are its conclusions too harsh? Is consideration of the extent to which the situation in Iraq has improved since 2003 the correct standard? Should the Americans and the Iraqis focus on what has been prevented rather than what has been achieved? Bowen, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, thinks so, writing in October 2012 that "The encouraging thing is that Iraq has not fallen apart."⁴¹ These questions and different alternative perspectives suggest that scholars will be debating the decision to invade Iraq and the impact of the invasion for a long time.

⁴⁰ Crocker quoted in T. Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, op.cit., p. 220.

⁴¹ *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress (October 30, 2012)*, Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, <http://www.sigir.mil/publications/quarterlyreports/October2012.html>.