# Playing the Imperial Game:
## The Mindset Behind the Attack on Iraq

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The United States' intervention in Iraq is but one example of a tradition of US foreign policy that has followed, rather than led, the corporate agenda. Preemptive military action is an extreme example but is among a number of strategic interventions including economic pressure, bypassing international legal constraints, and overthrowing legitimate, democratically elected governments for the purpose of market expansion. The most aggressive military actions are particularly expressed in ideological terms such as the desire to make the world a better place, one with democratic elections and the benefits of free trade. However, a more accurate description of the end goal of this strategy is to create an environment amenable to global corporate interests. We set the events of the Iraq war in the context of a strategic mindset of game theory that permits coercive actions and removes moral constraints in the selection of actions. We show how the Bush/Cheney administration went beyond the caveats of game theory by attempting to change the agreed-upon rules of the game at its own discretion.

The one hundred-year legacy of petro-imperialism in Iraq, and particularly the history of the relationship between the United States and Iraq, has been shielded from public view. The history reveals a mindset wherein the goals of freedom and democracy are clearly subservient to the calculations of corporate and military interests in a competitive game. We attempt here to cast light upon the thought pattern that enables the prominence of these competitive assumptions. The assumptions are consistent with the tenets of *realpolitik*, but a view of game-theory precepts can help to clarify the rationalizations used for some distinctly amoral moves. The ubiquitous use of gaming concepts to describe conflicts has offered US government authorities a way to frame its war

in Iraq as a matter of strategy choices and to conceal both the interests of the decision makers and transgressions of international law that we believe should be foremost in policy discussion. While contemporary wars of the Middle East have much less to do with differences between Islamic fundamentalism and expanding capitalist democracies than with resources, the outlook of game theory nevertheless reduces the possibility for dialogue and potential resolution of how to live with the ideological divisions. Before dealing with the particulars of the Iraqi case, it is useful to describe the analytical framework that defines this mode of thought.

## THE MINDSET OF COMPETITIVE GAMES

Game theory is a part of the science of rational decision-making. These theoretical frameworks were developed in business and engineering. Such tools are commonly used in calculations by corporations in search of investment strategies to compete most effectively and have been added to tools of the military planner. Game theory is a classification system, not of material things but rather of situations. In each situation the players are identified, moves are delineated, and payoffs or outcomes are defined. Winning might mean increasing one's profits or destroying one's competition. It might be defined as all-or-none victory versus doing better than one's adversaries. The range of permissible moves is spelled out: yes for checking the king in chess, no for overturning the board, yes for bombing raids, no for poisoning the water supply.

Mathematics then helps to select the best move. In the feudal monarchies of Europe, the purpose of the nation-state was to expand its size and power, and monarchs rehearsed their options in games with tin soldiers. When force might be applied to their purpose, a formal declaration of war was issued and noblemen led mercenary armies into specified battlegrounds. The rules were clear. Untenable positions brought about formal surrenders, the redrawing of borders and, frequently, ceremonial marriages to reunite the conflicting parties. Strategic elegance was valued and rulers like Frederick the Great rose to fame as master strategists. Then Napoleon brought chaos to the existing order. He used conscripts to fight, established ideological and ultimate end goals—liberty, equality, fraternity—and permitted costs well beyond the established norms. The age of Metternich came about as an effort by the monarchies of the time to restore the noble art of war to its "civilized" role as well defined contests for power among the nobility.

In some games there is a single move that is a best choice regardless of the countermoves of an adversary. In others one must assign probabilities about what an adversary is likely to do and venture a best guess favoured by the odds. Some conflicts have two parties, others many. Some are characterized by a zero-sum definition in which whatever is good for one side is bad for the other to that same degree. Others allow for outcomes in which both parties may come out worse or both may gain.[1]

Most important, game theory serves to abstract the particular strategic structure of a conflict. It is completely irrelevant whether the particular contest is played out on a game board with wooden pieces, on a computer simulation, or on a battlefield strewn with bodies. There are gains and losses to be considered but not pain or suffering. The essence for purposes here is not in the calculation of improved strategies but rather in the assumption that the situation at hand is one in which conscience does not matter, only strategy. As in poker, the magnitude of the payoffs (or losses) is a fact to be considered but the content of the payoff is irrelevant.[2] Once the parties, the payoffs, and the rules have been established, winning is all that matters. It is permissible within game theory to consider which country might be coerced into assuring a greater amount of oil for the United States. It would not be permissible within game theory to ask whether more oil is a desirable outcome. The game of securing more oil reserves for US and European companies has a long history. What has changed with contemporary policy toward the Middle East is that the world's largest superpower has determined that the rules of the game may be changed at its own option. Internationally agreed-upon rules for the game of war preclude unprovoked, preemptive military attack and the kidnapping, extradition, and torture of captives. Under existing international laws for the conduct of war, those responsible for the war in Iraq have gone beyond the rules of war and have engaged in criminal behavior.[3]

## LEGITIMIZING GLOBAL VIOLENCE

The actual mathematical tools of game theory are not always employed by governments or by corporations. In fact, honest application of the theory might illustrate to the parties that certain conflicts are just too costly and should not be played at all. But the mindset in which the world and its inhabitants are all instruments in a game to gain competitive advantage is very much a part of the belief system that legitimizes global violence. The theory plays the board as if no particular human existed on the other side. Even on one's own

side the sacrifices are not of people but of pawns that will provide gains for one's company or country. In a military occupation where torture is used to find, to punish, and to intimidate resistance, the game has been redefined as one in which the rules permit such abuse. The consequence that being found out might be bad for the side engaging in the practice, and might produce blowback or retaliation, becomes just one factor in calculating the likelihood of being caught and the ability of the opposition to benefit from exposing the practice.

## EXTERNALITIES: THE ACCEPTABILITY OF RISK

Just as the risks of being caught using banned and unethical modes of treating people can be calculated, so also can the loss of lives be entered into the selection of actions. In the game of war a life is valued primarily for its contribution to winning. Indeed, we find major corporate decisions taking into account what economists call externalities. Many activities with an intended purpose to profit from developments designed (or justified) to improve or to protect life come with unintended consequences. Dangerous materials used in manufacturing, seriously overcrowded highways, unsafe vehicles or pharmaceuticals, toxic chemical or radioactive waste dumps, and unhealthy fast foods all enter into the cost-benefit analysis. The goal is to produce as cheaply as possible something that will provide the greatest good while keeping certain harmful consequences within the acceptable range. The greatest good is of course dependent upon whose interests are considered most important. Likewise, the acceptability of rules depends upon who determines what is acceptable. The acceptability may look different for executives of a corporation that produces toxic chemical pesticides used to dust crops than to the parents of a child with leukemia. The model of thought requires that we consider everything—including material products, human lives, timber for construction, and the sound of songbirds—to have a monetary value. The market, like a giant game board, is left to determine what risks will be undertaken. The players with the greatest domination of chips control the directions of the market.

## END GOALS OF GLOBAL GAMES: THE EXPANSION OF MARKETS

Throughout history empires have typically followed the aspirations and military strength of rulers. Trade and resources have long been closely associated

with the use of military force.[4] For the US empire, the expansion was primarily a commercial one, dedicated to selling products overseas and dominating foreign markets. Pioneering firms such as Heinz, Singer, McCormick, Kodak, and Standard Oil shaped the direction of an imperial process by linking the purchase of US consumer goods abroad with "civilization" and "progress." During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, consumerism and commercialism were driving forces, marketing not only products but also racial and gender stereotypes. The messages were apparent in advertisements for sewing machines, processed food, and agricultural tools. The values of consumerism and commercialism have shaped, and continue to shape, the way the United States is seen. Military force and government action have tended to follow, rather than lead, the expansion of markets.[5]

## IDEOLOGICAL BELIEFS

The mindset of those whose decisions govern the paths of empires is important to understand. Surely wealth and power have been acknowledged motivations. But often accompanying such motives is a belief that the particular empire has a virtuous goal of spreading its benefits, as understood by its rulers, to other parts of the world. Powerful elites, successful in their own worlds, encapsulate themselves amongst a network of others who also believe in the virtue and legitimacy of their intentions. Ancient Rome, Qing China, France under Napoleon, imperial Britain, and the United States in the Americas did not simply invade and occupy other peoples' lands out of economic greed. In each case, empire was also driven, at times, by the desire to spread improvement and to export cultural and political practices that were seen as better and more civilized.[6] The contemporary goal of the neoconservative game is often expressed idealistically as the desire to make the world a better place, one with democratic elections and free trade.[7] Such thinking is often used to call upon soldiers and their families for sacrifices, but rarely does it call upon sacrifices from those who profit most from the expanded markets. When such thinking is accompanied by coercive interventionism, it is often the prelude to the fall of the empire.[8] Military historian Caleb Carr notes that empires with strong military forces have almost always taken on the tactics of terrorism, that is, brutal, punitive attacks upon civilians as part of the way they maintained influence. This occurred in Rome, recurred through Middle Eastern and European dynasties, and included the United States in its Civil War and in World War II. He also notes that such brutality to civilians is rarely successful and leads

to a decline in the empire,[9] perhaps an omen for the American empire of the present day.

## CREATING GOVERNMENTS WITH THE CORPORATE AGENDA

The major interest of large corporations is continued growth and expansion. The major threats to that expansion are the aspirations of people and governments who would apply the same resources needed for corporate growth to other purposes. Ideologies of local control over resources, of nationalism, or of communism, each in their own way, are impediments to corporate expansion. Governments espousing such postures are defined as the adversary in the game or conflict.

Policies actually undertaken reflect a planning process in which the needs of key players in the global marketplace are pursued as objectives of the game. An understanding of the degree of planning that goes into the US corporate and military domination of other nations owes much to the personal history of John Perkins. His clandestine position, first with the National Security Agency and then with a private company, was predicated upon an ability to make economic forecasts and sell loans to heads of state in undeveloped countries. He supervised a staff including economists who provided complex models that could be used to exaggerate the benefits to gross national product (GNP) of massive loans. The loans were always for the development of infrastructure, oil drilling and pipelines, dams, electric power grids, and building complexes. The contracts were awarded to such corporate giants as Bechtel, Halliburton, and Brown and Root. The inducements to foreign leaders included military and police aid and training, lucrative financial benefits, recognition in US diplomatic circles, and even the procurement of personal mistresses. The contracts would make a small group within the accepting country very wealthy.[10]

On the negative side, they would make the particular nation a client state of the United States, dependent upon further loans and adjustments to repay the incurred debts, and unable, therefore, to use the country's resources for a form of development that might provide sustainable productivity for its farmers, education and health-care for its children, and protections for its environment. Some populist leaders found the terms unacceptable. Many of the leaders who were more representative of the needs of their own people and

who refused the loan terms were removed in coups, assassinations, or airplane or helicopter "accidents."[11] If that did not produce a compliant government, the next steps were to foment a violent revolt and finally to send in the bombs, the military advisors, and the marines. With the game for resource control in play, only the most desired moves had to be determined.

## ECONOMIC INTERVENTION

The major ongoing interventions, occurring without the fanfare of war, are economic. The manipulation of local economies has been part of a worldwide effort to impose what has been labeled the "Washington Consensus." This has been forced on developing countries via procedures of the US government, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. John Williamson, a well-known British economist, developed its basic tenets in reforms, calling for economic deregulation, privatization, encouragement of foreign investment, unrestricted movement of capital, liberalization of trade policies, and reduction in public expenditures. This program of neoliberalism has been aggressively pushed as a primary US foreign policy goal. The strategy is focused on pressuring developing countries that depend on aid from major international lending agencies and the United States to implement structural adjustment programs that prescribe the changes a specific country must make in order to be considered credit worthy.[12]

Increasingly, official US strategy has been to support governments subservient to US corporate and military interests, to keep them in power through financial indebtedness and military control over their dissenters, and to think of a highly fortified Green Zone—with lush accommodations for visiting officials—as if that façade, rather than the people of the country, was the true US ally.[13] This makes sense if one considers that it is an elite network of diplomatic, financial, and military ties that determine the paths of information and influence. The strategy reflects not only the gamester's mentality and the dehumanization of casualties, but also the great distance between those few with great power and the rest of the population, who are seen as lesser players and whose views are considered irrelevant to the elite-created reality. The more reprehensible tactics may be concealed or, if discovered, may be denied. Where support is needed, from voters or from soldiers, it can be handled through persuasion, employment opportunities, and public relations.[14]

## BYPASSING LEGAL CONSTRAINTS

Pressure to create governments willing to play by the rules of neoliberalism has not always been through legal means. Difficult and risky efforts at espionage are the stock trade of highly trained special forces such as the Navy Seals. Other than when used for public relations value in publicizing successful rescue attempts, the work of the special forces is accountable only to high-level authorities and can act to assassinate individuals and create mayhem outside of public view.[15] The CIA, in addition to its highly professional role of gathering information, has also played a more clandestine role of subverting governments, destroying buildings and trains, and bribing both officials and crowds of people to gather their support.[16]

Recurring efforts by the US ambassador to Nicaragua to affect the outcome of elections provide an example of illicit meddling. In 1990 the Sandinistas lost an election to a US-funded opponent and Daniel Ortega stepped down as president. Prior to the 2006 presidential election, Roger Noriega, then the state department's top diplomat for Latin America, warned in a Managua newspaper that if Ortega won, "Nicaragua would sink like a stone." US Ambassador Paul Trivelli publicly told Nicaraguan reporters that Ortega was anti-democratic. High-level US diplomats—from former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to former Secretary of State Colin Powell to Reagan-era UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick—came to Managua to denounce the Sandinistas and Ortega, who was leading the five candidate race in opinion polls.[17]

Such actions clearly violated the April 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which asserts that representatives or diplomats "have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that state" to which they may be assigned. Despite international law, the United States has rarely felt constrained about intervening in the internal affairs of other countries. The United States has also been able to bypass the legal constraints upon such activity by exerting its influence through private organizations.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was founded in 1983 as a private organization funded completely by government revenue. Its purpose is to influence the direction of elections and policies in foreign countries through its recipient organizations, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). Such activities by another government would be illegal in the United States. The NED injects soft money into the domestic elections of foreign countries in favor of one party or the other. In a relatively poor country, a few hundred thousand dollars

of assistance can well have a decisive influence. It is particularly Orwellian to call US manipulation of foreign elections "promoting democracy."[18]

Just as manipulation of governments can be concealed by privatization, so too can the actual acts of war be contracted out to security organizations providing employment for modern day mercenaries.[19] When contracted mercenaries engage in actions beyond the rules of engagement, the deeds are less clearly linked to the government that has hired them.

## OVERTHROWING GOVERNMENTS

One strategy for the exercise of power is to overthrow governments unwilling to accept domination by American interests. The United States has used military force to overthrow a legitimate government on fourteen occasions, starting with Hawaii toward the end of the nineteenth century.[20] Greg Grandin writes of numerous coup efforts by the United States in Latin America and the continuity of such US responses in the Middle East:

> After World War II, in the name of containing Communism, the United States, mostly through the actions of local allies, executed or encouraged coups in, among other places, Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina and patronized a brutal mercenary war in Nicaragua. For 150 years Nicaragua has borne the brunt of more interventions than almost any other country in this hemisphere . . . . Indeed, Reagan's Central American wars can best be understood as a dress rehearsal for what is going on now in the Middle East. It was in these wars where the coalition made up of neoconservatives, Christian evangelicals, free marketers, and nationalists that today stands behind George W. Bush's expansive foreign policy first came together.[21]

The game of propping up banana republics precedes this century and began well before the Reagan administration. But the gradual evolution of both proxy wars and preemptive attacks was to remove even the constraints of what had been called "just wars."

## IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST: PREEMPTIVE MILITARY ACTION

A gaming mentality selects the optimal strategy for the moment. Neither cultural nor historical context are included in the considerations. Just as the history of Vietnamese nationalism was ignored by the elite strategists of the

Vietnam War, Iraq's history of one hundred years of petro-imperialism was also ignored. In 1897, England's government assumed a protectorate over Kuwait, which was carved out of Iraq. As oil was gaining importance, England and Germany warred over the Berlin-Baghdad railroad, with Britain invading the entire region of Turkish Mesopotamia, eventually overcoming German-led Kurdish troops. The secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement arranged for a French and British split over the oil-rich area, although the British later claimed the greatest share. Turkey, in 1922, fought to regain the area of Mosul but was defeated. Reneging on promises of self-determination, the British, from 1919 to 1958, relied on aerial bombing to crush Iraqi resistance. In 1941 Iraq was the battleground for war between England and Germany aided by Italy and the puppet Vichey government of conquered France.[22]

The first half of the twentieth century was a story of France, Britain, Germany, and the United States repeatedly overthrowing governments in Iraq and Iran in a struggle for domination over oil.[23] The policy continued as popular or democratically elected leaders of resource-rich countries who had lost favor with the US were forcefully removed. This occurred with Bosch in the Dominican Republic,[24] Arbenz in Guatemala,[25] and Allende in Chile.[26] The 1953 removal of Mossadegh in Iran is illustrative of the moves considered suitable for evasion of international obligations.

Kermit Roosevelt of the CIA was sent to overthrow the democratically elected Mossadegh in Iran, whose crime had been an attempt to nationalize the Anglo-American oil company. The agent began by bribing members of Parliament to denounce him in Parliament. Then religious Mullahs were bribed to denounce him as an atheist enemy of Islam.[27] Within a few weeks of bribing reporters and editors the agent had 80% of the Teheran press on his payroll. Roosevelt also bribed members of police units and low-ranking military officers to be ready with their units on the crucial day. In his culminating scheme, he hired the leaders of street gangs in Tehran to help create the impression that the rule of law had totally disintegrated in Iran. He hired a gang to run through the streets of Tehran, beating up pedestrians, breaking shop windows, firing their guns into mosques, and yelling, "We love Mossadegh and communism." This turned many citizens against him. Then Roosevelt hired a second mob to attack the first mob to give people the impression that there was no police presence and order had completely disintegrated.

Within a few weeks, this one agent operating with a large sum of cash and a network of Iranian contacts had taken a fairly stable country and thrown

it into complete upheaval. The first attempt at a coup failed but the agent Roosevelt arranged to recruit young men in a struggling economy with the promise of a good day's pay. They were hired to be part of another mob shouting slogans on the street, never knowing they were being paid by the CIA. Roosevelt had been spending $11,000 a week to bribe members of the Iranian parliament, who then whipped up the crowds. The average annual income in Iran at that time was about $500. At crucial moments, police and military units joined the crowd and started gunfights in front of government buildings, including even the prime minister's house. About one hundred people were killed in front of Mossadegh's house. A military leader, who had been bribed, arrived with a column of tanks and Mossadegh was no longer able to retain his position. A general, selected by the CIA, was installed as prime minister. The Shah Pavlevi returned from exile in Rome to become a particularly feared monarch. Roosevelt went on to become government relations director and then a vice-president for Gulf Oil. The CIA director at that time was Alan Dulles, an associate of the law firm providing legal counsel for the Anglo-American Oil Company.[28] Dulles was impressed by this example of regime change in Iran. Ten months later it was attempted in Guatemala, also against a democratically elected leader. This second "success" led to other attempts from Indonesia to Chile, to Cuba, to Vietnam, to the Congo.

The Shah of Iran followed pro-Western policies, particularly restoring control of oil reserves to Anglo-American Oil but with a substantial cut to US companies. He relied upon brutal police methods to maintain control and in turn was eventually overthrown by the religious Mullahs who have remained suspicious of US intentions ever since. The anti-Western blowback from religious leaders like the Ayatollah Khomeini who overthrew the Shah was not what US officials had intended, and the capture of American hostages by Iran helped bring the Reagan administration into power.

Efforts to control Middle Eastern oil were ongoing. In 1959, the United States attempted a coup against Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Qarim Qasim in response to his nationalist intentions regarding the profits from oil. Heavy-handed involvement by the United States appeared in 1973, when Secretary of Defense Schlessinger sought British support for a joint airborne attack. To address the threat of OPEC control, the plan promoted by Secretary of State Kissinger called for seizing Saudi oil fields and installations. In 1983, President Reagan initiated a diplomatic opening to Iraq. Iraq was in the third year of a war of attrition against neighboring Iran. By 1982, the tide had turned to

favor the larger Iran. The Reagan administration sent Donald Rumsfeld as an emissary to Saddam Hussein. Rumsfeld helped to arrange support for the Iraqi strongman, even after learning that Iraq had begun to use chemical weapons against Iran, the first sustained use of poison gas since a 1925 treaty banning chemical weapons.

After the Rumsfeld mission, the United States offered Hussein financial credits, making Iraq the third-largest recipient of US assistance. It normalized diplomatic relations and began providing Iraq with battlefield intelligence that was used to target Iranian troops. And when Iraq turned its chemical weapons on the Kurds in 1988, killing five thousand in the town of Halabja, the Reagan administration sought to obscure responsibility.[29]

On 25 August 1988—five days after the Iran-Iraq War ended—Iraq attacked forty-eight Kurdish villages more than one hundred miles from Iran. The next year, President George H. W. Bush's administration doubled US financial credits for Iraq. A week before Hussein invaded Kuwait, the administration opposed legislation that would have conditioned US assistance to Iraq on a commitment not to use chemical weapons and to stop the genocide against the Kurds. At the time, Dick Cheney was secretary of defense and a member of the National Security Council that reviewed and supported Iraq policy. By all accounts, he supported the administration's appeasement policy. The Iraqi misdeeds were ignored by the administration and by the mainstream press, that is, until the United States had determined that Iraq was to be demonized in preparation for a US attack.

That Rumsfeld, subsequently secretary of defense, and Cheney, subsequently vice-president, should be among those citing Iraq's brutal use of chemical weapons as a reason for war seems hypocritical.[30] Yet it shows the internalized worldview of the strategic gamester. Iraq was supported as a balance to the power of Iran and a possible helper in the Middle East peace process. Hussein seriously miscalculated by invading Kuwait in response to its role in lowering oil prices. But the individuals who had assisted this cruel ruler were the same who later accused opponents of the Iraq war of appeasing a Hitler-like monster. Informed observers see the neoconservative-planned invasion of Iraq to have been based upon an ideological belief that the United States is the dominant military power; that it can privatize its resources and its reconstruction to the benefit of corporate investors; and that it can take over and change regimes in other countries without attempting to understand their history, their values, or their culture, and without paying serious attention to

the devastating human consequences on the ground.[31] The righteous cause outweighed all obstacles and the need to hear other voices. One former CIA agent, Pelletiere, cites major deception by US officials leading to both the 1991 and the 2003 invasions of Iraq, comparing them to the "big lie" that Germany used to defend its launching of World War II.[32]

The modern history of clashes between the United States and the Middle East includes US efforts to train the radical Mujahedin, predecessors of the Taliban in Afghanistan, to fight against the Soviet Union.[33] The US support for Iraq to wage a war with chemical weapons against Iran (until Iraq's ill-advised invasion of Kuwait) is yet another fact of recent history.[34] In 1990, George Bush, Sr. gave Saudi King Fahd a written promise that he would remove US troops after the Gulf War. However, US troops, warplanes, and other military hardware remained in the Gulf Arab monarchies thereafter. The continued presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia is claimed to have so enraged Osama bin Laden that he orchestrated the horrific 9/11 attack on the United States.[35] On 20 January 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that the US military presence in Saudi Arabia would end when the world had turned into "the kind of place we dreamed of."[36] Powell explained that the American troops on Saudi Arabian soil "serve a useful purpose there as a deterrent to Saddam Hussein, but beyond that a symbol of American presence and influence. We've always wanted to maintain a presence in that part of the world, for a variety of reasons."[37]

There are two related answers to why this is true. First, Iraq's rich oil reserves were relatively untapped. The other is seen in the history of map making. In 1914, the *Petroleum Review* of London printed its map of Mesopotamian oil and asphalt fields and the route of the Berlin-Baghdad railroad. Since 1930, two types of maps have evolved. The first indicated the nations, mostly new, that had been created. The second type cut the entire region into squares, each one with the initials of the petroleum corporate giant laying claim to the area. Maps prepared for former Vice-President Cheney's National Energy Policy Group in 2001 and the National Security Council were later revealed under a federal court order. These detailed Iraq's oil fields, pipelines, and refineries, as well as a list of "foreign suitors for Iraqi oilfield contracts." That list included sixty firms from thirty countries—including Russia, France, China, and India—all of whom were ready to negotiate contracts with Iraq, much to the dismay of US-based oil companies. Fadel Gheit, a New York-based oil analyst wrote, "Think of Iraq as a military base with a very large oil reserve underneath

. . . . You can't ask for better than that."[38] The history casts doubt upon the public rationale provided for an invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Iraq was considered first on the US list of targets for a new national security doctrine of preemptive action against states considered hostile. The United States would become a law unto itself, creating new rules regarding international engagement without agreement by other nations. The plan of the Bush-Cheney administration, as outlined in the National Security Strategy, had a suggested budget of $379 billion. It made explicit the objective of a major expansion of US military presence on a global basis (beyond troops already present in approximately 130 countries) for constabulary or policing functions. It discussed the development of the "robust nuclear earth penetrator" for combat use, the use of American power to remove by force foreign leaders seen as threats, and the reliance on American political leadership rather than that of the United Nations.[39] However, the threat from Iraq was not specific, not clearly established, and not shown to be imminent. The invasion, therefore, went beyond provisions of international law for anticipatory self-defense. A unilateral attack on Iraq was outside the framework of the global law that the United States initially helped create.[40] The display of military power, the securing of oil reserves, and the hope to assure a government friendly to US corporate interests have been noted as other motives for a war against Iraq:

> Contrary to propaganda orchestrated from Washington and London, the coming attack has nothing to do with Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction," if these exist at all. The reason is that America wants a more compliant thug to run the world's greatest source of oil.[41]

The game of maximizing benefits of oil resources was played as well by Iraq. Viewed from the angle of global oil prices, there is a striking symmetry underlying the two US-led wars against Iraq. The first, in 1990, was started by Saddam Hussein because he considered the price of oil too low; the second in 2003 by George W. Bush because he considered the price of oil too high. Writing in opposition to the 2003 Iraq war, eminent international relations scholars Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer pointed out that Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait in 1990 was primarily an attempt to deal with Iraq's continued economic vulnerability following the Iran-Iraq War. Kuwait exacerbated Iraq's problems by refusing to loan Iraq $10 billion and to write off debts Iraq had incurred during the Iran-Iraq War. Kuwait overproduced the quotas set by OPEC, which drove down world oil prices and reduced Iraqi oil profits.[42]

Conversely, a key objective of the 2003 Iraq War can be inferred from an economic vision for postwar Iraq propounded by Ariel Cohen and Gerald O'Driscoll, Jr., writing for the Washington DC-based conservative Heritage think tank. They note,

> An unencumbered flow of Iraqi oil would be likely to provide a more constant supply of oil to the global market, which would dampen price fluctuations, ensuring stable oil prices in the world market in a price range lower than the current $25 to $30 a barrel. Eventually, this will be a win-win game: Iraq will emerge with a more viable oil industry, while the world will benefit from a more stable and abundant oil supply.[43]

The opposite turned out to be true. Iraq's oil industry was destroyed. Between $5 billion and $10 billion would be needed to return capacity to prewar levels and an additional $15 to $25 billion to raise output to five million barrels per day, leaving it still short of the seven to eight million barrels per day eventually envisaged by Cohen and O'Driscoll.[44] Limited supply during this time led to US oil companies enjoying record profits.

An unheralded change in the ostensible goals of the game occurred when it became clear that privatization of Iraqi reconstruction could be highly lucrative. US corporations enjoyed a tremendous windfall from mismanaged and unsuccessful reconstruction efforts. One hundred fifty corporations received up to $50 billion in contracts. Military planning for the invasion and its aftermath are now widely recognized as seriously bungled.[45] Nonetheless, stunning successes of corporations in penetrating Iraq have been recorded. As Antonia Juhasz points out in her book *The Bush Agenda: Invading the World, One Economy at a Time,* the contracts were meticulously planned by the consulting company BearingPoint, Inc, which received a $250 million contract to rewrite the entire economy of Iraq.[46] This was part of an attempt to implement the neoliberal economic policies of the Washington Consensus. The BearingPoint website proclaims their ability to deliver "Sustainable success. Not just a single event but a series of successful outcomes."[47] The people of Iraq, many of whom were still lacking regular electricity, running water, and sewage services three years after the reconstruction began, might differ from BearingPoint on the definition of success. One clear conclusion is that the neoliberal economic agenda and consulting firms like BearingPoint that help implement it are an integral component of the machinery of modern warfare. In the mindset of the gamester, however, there are no people of Iraq who exist as ends in themselves.

There are only collaborators and resisters, the former sometimes listed as collateral damage, the latter as targets.

In January 2007, within days of George W. Bush's announcement of his plan to increase the number of US troops in Iraq by twenty thousand, with over three thousand American soldiers and more than six hundred thousand Iraqi citizens dead, it became public knowledge that the US and UK governments were radically redrawing Iraq's oil industry and opening the doors to the third-largest oil reserves in the world, allowing the first large-scale operation of foreign oil companies in the country since the industry was nationalized in 1972.[48] With this legislation came production-sharing agreements (PSAs) between the Iraqi government and oil industry giants Exxon Mobil, Shell, and British Petroleum; in exchange for investing in and maintaining the infrastructure and operation of the wells, pipelines, and refineries, Western corporations are to receive up to 75 percent of Iraqi oil profits for the next thirty years.[49]

Barry Lando reminds us of the US president's repeated citing of the threat to freedom in Iraq if the US withdrew.

> But that lofty cause was nothing but political window dressing. Indeed allowing the people of Iraq a real choice in their future had always been a *threat* to the US and other great powers, not a goal. What counted was which local leaders would gain control of the region and its resources and how amenable they would be to great power interests. Not if they were freely elected.[50]

In its sixth year since invading Iraq, US officials relate only to a heavily fortified Green Zone and to a government serving at the behest of the occupiers as if that represented Iraq. The terms offered to that government of surrendering the oil reserves, permitting permanent US bases, and crushing or containing those who resist point to the US administration's game theory mindset. The expectation was that a government, set in place by consent of an occupying military, could be pressured to accept such terms. There was no place in the game plan to hear the bitterness of people whose lives have been ravaged by the war, who want the troops out, and want the resources of their country to benefit its own citizens.[51]

The gaming orientation permits a narrowing of focus to that of a defined contest between opposing players. The failure to consider history, tribal identities, and culture that occurred in Iraq has been equally disastrous in Afghanistan.[52] The issues dividing ideologies favoring the expansion of the global economy from those favoring a nativistic or fundamentalist alternative are

matters not for zero sum conflict but for dialogue. To the extent that conflicts regarding military security are defined in international law, the established rules of the game preclude preemptive war, actions that cause civilian casualties, plunder of resources, and torture of enemies. While clandestine transgressions have always occurred, the perspective of the world's current military super-power is one in which ultimate force permits facts to be ignored and assures ultimate victory. In defined conflicts that are clearly limited by rules or laws, the parties are often tempted to go beyond proscriptions. Whistling or tapping to distract one's opponent in chess or taking performance enhancing drugs are examples. The beliefs and institutions that condone such paramilitary activity require a broader theory of why Iraq was attacked. That theory includes identi-fication of the inner network of military decision makers, understanding their ability to create enemies, and the mechanisms at their disposal to facilitate multinational corporate expansion. Crusades such as anti-communism and a war on terror are designed to promote and profit from such broadening of the agenda.[53] Even destructive crises provide opportunities for corporate contractors to rebuild.[54] Failure to understand the game contributes to our tendency to view the Iraq fiasco as a mistake rather than a product of a system that produces such tragedies.

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