



## **The World Today**

### **The Changing Dynamic of International Relations: Rationalizing the USA led multilateral action in Iraq**

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The USA led multilateral action on Iraq is an extraordinary event in the history of International Politics. Certainly, there has been a history of involvement of Western colonial powers in the Middle East, notably Britain, France and Italy. And, the USA itself continues to maintain military relationships and has established military bases in a number of Arab states. However, the simultaneous efforts of the democratization and reconstruction of the Iraqi political economy present a myriad of issues for academia and the wider world to discuss.

The historical chronology of events compels one to ask a few pertinent questions. However, this writer will only engage in the discussion of the primary question of the rationale behind the Washington led action in Iraq.

Undoubtedly, one of the primary arguments behind the action in Iraq was the desire to extend USA's hegemony and to safeguard US energy policy as it relates to the country's national interests. Consequently, the argument also exists that USA's presence in the Middle East is closely tied to the domestic and regional policies of Israel. US military presence in region affords Israel greater flexibility in its pursuit of its national interest in the largely Arabic geographic space of the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, many analysts have argued that the United States' war on Iraq was to a great extent Israel's war. It is argued that political pressure was placed on the Bush administration, by parties both inside and outside Washington, to engage in the pre-emptive strike against the Saddam Hussein led Iraqi government. Powerful pro-Israeli lobbies in Washington such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee have predicted 'a great victory in Iraq'.

For Israel, the Allied military presence in Iraq is more than a question of military security. It presents an unprecedented opportunity to create an environment in the Middle East which would allow Israel to set its own terms for its relations with the other states in the region. There is a concern that the historical events that led to the construction of the Israel state may inevitably lead to a Palestinian entity, with unfortunate similarities to the apartheid regime which until recently was internationally identifiable with South Africa.

The region's Arab nations should play a crucial part in finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestine dilemma, and also in determining a path for the reconstruction of Iraq, as both of these situations affect the stability of the region. Separately, there must be role for the USA and its allies in determining a method for including not only Syria and Iran, but all neighbouring states, in the pertinent discussions on the democratization and reconstruction of Iraq. There have been calls for the USA to extend its foreign policy to engage in diplomatic discussions with Syria and Iran. Opposing perspectives regarding the link between religion and the state, in the Middle East should be considered in the on-going debate.

One must not ignore the geopolitical significance of natural resources in the question of stability in the Global Order. Equally as important as the issues of regional security and the Israel-Palestinian quandary, is the issue of Iraq's natural resources. The re-opening of an old pipeline that linked Iraq to Haifa (in Israel) before Israel was created in 1948 would ensure an uninterrupted supply of oil. Additionally, the abundance of water in Iraq is a significant factor for the sustainability of the region given its perennial concerns regarding water scarcity.

The involvement of international oil companies in the management of the world's second largest oil reserves sheds yet another light on the action in Iraq. Controversy surrounds the inclusion of these oil companies in the shaping of post Saddam Hussein Iraq. For instance, Chevron Texaco, on whose board Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice once served, has already expressed interest in entering the oil sector in Iraq. Underlying this is the notion that there is a movement to quickly privatize the Iraqi oil sector, at American insistence. To illustrate the significance of oil to the action on Iraq, several media commentators have highlighted that the building housing the Ministry relating to Petroleum Affairs in Baghdad was one of only two Ministerial buildings not destroyed by the multilateral action on Iraq; the other being the Ministry of the Interior.

Closely related to control over oil are the economic gains to be made from the reconstruction of Iraq. It has been estimated that reconstruction directly connected to the oil sector would require an investment of about 38 billion US dollars, with most of the benefits reportedly going to American companies. Halliburton, a company in which US Vice President Cheney was at one point involved as Chief Executive, and its subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root, are slated for major projects. Another US company, Bechtel Corporation has been contracted to rebuild Iraq's power, water and sewage systems, as well as the air and sea ports.

There is perhaps another economic reason which played a part in the action on Iraq. A shift from the use of the US dollar to the Euro in the international petroleum market and consequently, begs the question of who will dominate the world economically, in the foreseeable future – the USA or the European Union? Under an Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreement, transactions on the international petroleum market have taken place in US dollars since 1971, after the demise of the gold standard. This made the US dollar the de facto major international trading currency.

However, in October 2000, Iraq switched to trading its oil in Euros, and other OPEC members also began considering a switch. Such a shift would require major reorganization of the entire global economic system.

The issues surrounding the US-led action on Iraq will have repercussions, not only for the political struggle in the Middle East, but also on developing countries such as those in the Caribbean.