

Whether the realism school still works today with the iraq war

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| Analysis on Whether the Realism School Still Works Today with the Iraq War as the Example| Word count : 4056 MB240672 Zhao Tiantian (Daisy)| |

ProfileAdmin [Pick the date] | 1. Introduction After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seems that the Realism school of international relations has been at an embarrassing position. The scholars of realism had not predicted the result of the confrontation of the United States and Russia.

At the same time, with the further development of other schools of the international relations, such as the Liberalism, Constructivism and English school, the realism school is regarded to undergoing a weakening trend, for its inability to give a satisfactory explanation of so much cooperation, negotiation and other situation in the ever-changing political environment. While does that really mean the realism school of international relations lose its significance to study? The answer is definitely no.

As one of the most classical school, flourishing for such a long time, it is bound to have its reasonability on some specific issues. Then does it can still be persuasive in this century and explain some specific events in the world nowadays? Is the realism school still practical in analyzing some situation and worthwhile to keep further study on it? The author thinks it is appropriate to study it with an example of war happened recently to see is there any changed expression of the school.

In that way, we can understand the school and the world better to promote the development and keep the relatively stable situation of the globe. Even though after the World War Two, there is rare large scale of wars like that, involving so many states or covering so broad area. The disputes, conflicts

and wars happened in different regions and among different states, absolutely cannot be compared with the world war. One of the examples of such kind is the Iraq War. On March 20 2003, the United American firstly started an invasion of Ba'athist Iraq with its coalition, the United Kingdom.

Before the war, the governments of two states claimed that Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) posed a threat to their security and that of coalition or regional allies. ¹ As we all know, after 9. 11, anti-terrorism has become a top agenda to America, so the US government also condemned Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq provides the protection and support of Al-Qaeda as well as financial support for the families of Palestinians suicide bombers. On top of this, the human rights abuses of Iraqi government also could be seen as the reason for the US to start the war.

While are these reasons really true without other purpose? The investigators of WMD in Iraq did not find any evidence to prove, on the contrary, they got the conclusion that Iraq had already ended its nuclear, biological and chemical program in 1991 and had no active program at the time of the invasion. ² Even without the permit from the UN, not conforming to the specific rules of international law, the US started a military attack to Iraq surprisingly. So is it really a justice war like that announced by the US government, is there any other reason for the start of the war related to the self-interest of the US?

This war could embody what kind of information and be relevant to the realism school of international relations? The author would provide a further

analysis on it. First, the introduction of the realism school of international relations would be given, which includes the main principles and several branches of the realism school related to the case studied here. Then the author would also present information of the international law and international organizations to show how the US, as the most powerful state today won its purpose and self-interest and protect its security in the “anarchy” world.

And analysis would start from the reason announced by the US government, how they really embody the real intention of the US. Then try to find is there any other potential reason hid the event in order to prove how the US behaved in line with the realism school. 2. Literature review Realism school of international relations is a kind of theory and practice, focusing on the balance of power among states more than ideality and mortality. There are several fundamental principles of the school.

Firstly, the international system is under the state of anarchy which means there is not an authoritarian actor to manage the international society and address the disputes or conflicts among different states. Secondly, the sovereign states are the most significant actors in the international system instead of international organizations, non-government organizations or multi-national enterprises, and sometimes the more attention is given to the great powers which have much more saying in the international interactions.

Thirdly, all states within the system are unitary and rational actors. 3Considering the other states response to their own behavior, those states would also pay attention to the outside environment and choose the

strategic measures to try their best to survive. Because that states always tend to pursue self-interest and groups strive to attain as many resources as possible. 4Fourthly, the most principle goal of a state is survival and security. “ States seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order.

Survival dominates other motives because, once a state is conquered, it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue other aims. ” 5 While for this reason, it is possible to lead to a kind of troublesome situation, called “ security dilemma”. It means one state tries to strengthen its military power by increasing its army or other means which could cause the insecurity of another state. Due to the uncertainty of the other’s real intention, lack of information, incentive to misrepresent and some private information, it is very likely for this state to take the same measures to protect itself.

Therefore, these two states would be trapped in the “ security dilemma” and that would easily cause the war. Fifthly, power is given the priority by every state, seeking power especially the military power sometimes is regarded as the top agenda for each state. Only with the power, can a state guarantee its security to further pursue other development and stability. Of course, realism is a complex school which could be divided into several specific branches with each distinguished characteristic. First of all, the Classical Realism holds that in the real world, the weak is always falling to the strong.

The anarchy to the world means the law of the jungle, so states pursue the maximization of power. Second, Neorealism also called Structural Realism claims that even though the major actor is state, there is not difference in

the function of states. What impact the foreign policies are the various positions of states in the international system structure. Third, Offensive Realism, with the representative of John Mearsheimer insists on the idea that self-help is the only way to survive without help from the trusted others under the anarchy.

Seeking self-interest and establishing its own power are of great importance. What is more, there are Defensive Realism and Neoclassical Realism which the author would not explain too much about them. Then international law should be mentioned here. International law is the set of rules generally regarded and accepted as binding in relations between states and nations. It serves as the indispensable framework for the practice of stable and organized international relations. Meanwhile, international law is consent-based governance.

This means that a state member of the international community is not obliged to abide by international law unless it has expressly consented to a particular course of conduct. Although many kinds of cooperation and negotiation can be seen in the world, it is still reasonable to consider the inherent reason for them. Does that mean a state could learn to become benevolent, doing good things and thinking of others more than of itself? Under such kind of background, because of the only reliable method of self-help in the anarchical world, international law is so weak as well as the international cooperation.

With the spread of Fascism and the explosion of the World War Two, classical realism rose rapidly and dominated the theory and practice of international

relations during the period of Cold War. Under the great influence of classical realism, not only the study of international law was greatly affected, but also the practices of international organizations were affected negatively. Some scholars of early realism hold that the international law could play part of role in stipulating and constraining the states' behavior during the fight for power in the international relations.

But still many scholars keep doubt to the real function of international law, because of the lack of some important properties like domestic law, such as institutions of legislation, jurisdiction and enforcement. In the book of Edward H Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* he points out the nature of international law that "international law differs from the municipal law of modern states in being the law of an undeveloped and not fully integrated community. It lacks three institutions which are essential parts of any developed system of municipal law: a judicature, an executive and a legislature. 9 To sum up, they tend to regard the international law as a kind of original law with serious flaw. On the other hand, due to the short of compelling force, the international law is considered as soft. 10 On top of the mentioned shortcomings of it, the limitation from willingness of states whether to accept the rules, ambiguity of the law's provision and other factors decide that there is no room to ply for international law to seek power and secure international relations.

Especially in the conflict between the states interests and the use of international law which are strong and weak respectively, law has to submit to the reality, for its pursuit of a kind of "morality". If a state's survival is not

a focus of a law, namely, if the existing international system causes the successive problems of survival, it is possible for us to get a pessimistic conclusion that states are still trampling the international law. 1 As for the international organizations, with the increasingly more frequent international interaction and the deeper independence among states, they have also showed new changes, such as the larger scale of the organizations and better network of different states compared with the past. The United Nations is one of the largest and also the most important organizations in the world now with the most members. It is undoubtedly that in the term of controlling the regional conflicts and relieving the expansion of that.

But it still faces with lots of challenges, particularly faced with the powerful states holding the superb position, and then its role shows some degree of being weakened which would embody in the following parts of the thesis. 3. Case study After September 11 attack happened in America, Bush, the president of the US announced the war to the "terrorism" recognized by the US government and put Iraq into the list of "Axis of Evil". While on July the 8th 2002, Bush said that changing the Iraq's regime is one of the American state policies on a press conference, "taking every measure to realize this goal".

On September the 12th the US government listed the examples of Iraq's break of its promise to the international community since the Gulf War and urged the UN to take actions to force Iraq to destroy the weapons of mass Destruction. So in 2002, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1441 which called for Iraq to completely cooperate with UN

weapon inspectors to verify that Iraq was not in possession of WMD and cruise missile. 2 It is easy to get a conclusion that since 2001, there has already been the tight atmosphere or also can be said that the crisis escalated between the US, the only onesuperpowerin the world and Iraq, an important state in the Middle East with great amount of oil reserve. The reason for starting the war as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, firstly, the WMD problem. The US claimed to search and eliminate the weapons of mass destruction. Regardless of the fact that whether Iraq really held the WMD, it is easy to understand the situation that it is the possibility that makes the US really worried.

It can be considered as a kind of “ security dilemma”. Iraq may develop the nuclear energy for their own purpose instead of hurting any other states. But due to the preconceived idea of Iraq, regarding it as the “ Axis of Evil” and worry of the potential terrorists of the state to make use of the WMD to continue their destruction, it is understandable for the US to take measures to try to get rid of this crisis in order to protect itself. Why the US does not say too much about the same situation happened in other countries, such as China or Japan?

It depends on the real interest relationship between two. The Iraq war also related to the principle of the realism school in which guaranteeing the survival is the most significant goal for a state. The US thought the possession of WMD had become a huge threat to its survival and security. The action that Iraq might have WMD led to the insecurity of the US or the fear for that kind of insecurity. Therefore, two states were trapped into the “

security dilemma". While as the much more powerful one, the US adopted actions firstly.

As to the second reason, to end the human rights abuses in Iraq and to establish an autonomous government for the Iraqi seems really weak. There is no permission for attacking a state for such kind of excuses. Even though such situation existed once, it does not mean that is right. Just from this reason, it is can be seen that the US really regards itself as an indispensable mediator with its strong political and economic strength and superb position in the globe. The author claims that many policies and measures taken by the US stand the emergence of a new kind of hegemony which conforms to the realism school.

Why is it said as new? Compared with the traditional hegemony of European countries in different historical periods, like Portugal, Spain, Holland and the UK, the US does not seek the marine hegemony, colonial hegemony or military hegemony, and it has a distinguished theory, purpose and process. In the regard of theory, the US preaches itsresponsibilityof maintaining the international order, emphasizing the moral foundation and legality of its behavior. In the regard of process, the US is focus on diplomacy, negotiation, economic sanctions and military intervention.

The purpose of the military method is to punish those states which violate the international order and human rights instead of conquering the land through military force. And eventually, through the promotion of political and economic system, the influence on lifestyle as well as the spread of ideology, the US would like to maximize the security and interests of itself and lead

the world. Before the Iraq war began on 20 March 2003, France, Germany rejected to join the military attack to Iraq with the US.

The US only won the support of its old coalition, the United Kingdom. Even on 20 January 2003, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin declared " we believe that military intervention would be the worst solution" ¹³ Meanwhile, in March 2003, Hans Bilx, the chief UN weapons inspector reported that " No evidence of proscribed activities have so far been found" in Iraq, saying that progress was made in inspections which would continue. He estimated the time remaining for disarmament being verified through inspections to be month". ⁴ However the US announced that " diplomacy has failed" and that it would proceed with a coalition of allied countries, called the " coalition of the willing" to rid Iraq of its alleged WMD. The US government abruptly advised the UN weapons inspectors to leave Baghdad immediately. ¹⁵ Under the general circumstances, when the US had not found the evidence of development of WMD and terrorist attack in Iraq, realizing the reason for the war is not sufficient, it should stop its plan invade and turn the follow-up work to the UN and other international organizations.

It is regret that America did not do that. What is more, in October 2002 former US President Bill Clinton warned about possible dangers of preemptive military action against Iraq. Speaking in the UK on a Labor Party conference he said: " As a preemptive action today, however well-justified, may come back with unwelcome consequences in the future.... I don't care how precise your bombs and your weapons are, when you set them off, innocent people will die. ¹⁶ Then what is preemptive war? It means that a

war is imminent and appears to be unable to avoid, then one of the states would start the war, considering the first one would enjoy some kind of advantage. And there is also another kind of theory similar with it, called the “preventive” self-defense sharing the similar connotation. The Iraq war actually happened in this way. Since September 11 2001, the US had already made preparations for this preventive self-defense.

It classified the North Korea, Iraq and Iran as the “Axis of Evil” and delivered a speech in West Point, saying the victory of anti-terrorism cannot be won by self-defense, we have to launch attack to destroy their plans and eliminate the most severe threat in advance. And three months later, Bush’s government issued a document named National Security of the United States explained that even though the US would insist on pursuing support from the international community, it would take measures to practice its right of self-defense and crack down the terrorists preemptively.

Therefore, according to the words of President Bush, it is not difficult to find that there are several characteristics of the so-called preventive self-defense. First, only when the US thinks its security is under threat, it has the right to take measures or attack enemies preemptively regardless of the opposition from the international community and objection from the UN. Second, it does not require that the threat is extremely urgent.

Maybe a conclusion can be got that the Iraq war is a unilateral military attack taken by the US and the UK, but not being attacked by Iraq or even without solid evidence that the threat is really serious as well as ignoring the undergoing inspection in Iraq conducted by the Security Council. Moreover,

the Article 2 of charter of the United Nations “ All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations. 17 should be applied as a basic principle of today’s international law and followed by all states. And different from the self-defense in the Article 51 of Charter of the United Nations in which “ Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security” 18 However without getting the authorization from the Security Council to take military sanction on Iraq, enough proof to be at the dangerous position, the US chose to fight. In line of the existing international law, the Iraq War is an illegal use of military force to a sovereign state.

In July 2010, Deputy Prime Minister of the UK Nick Clegg, in an official PMQs session in Parliament, condemned the invasion of Iraq as illegal. 19 So return to the realism reflected relevant to the war, it is the strong power of the US that makes it behave in a disorderly manner without fear, making a detour of the UN and violating the international law to realize its own purpose. Even in

the 21st century, the international institutions or organizations are still very weak in some situation, especially faced with a superpower.

Because this world is still a law of the jungle to a certain degree, the reality of anarchy does not change, even there are some organizations or institutions in the world, what the extent of the role it can play is another story. On the other hand, since the World War One and Two, crisis of oil in 1973 and the Persian Gulf War, states' leaders have noticed that crude oil is the most important fundamental raw material of the greatest strategic significance. However the major reserve and production area gather in the Middle East where the political situation is always unstable with frequent disputes or conflicts.

Therefore, that brings the risks of the provision of the crude oil in the global market. And for that reason, it is likely for us to think the fight for crude oil is or will still be the center of the tense situation of international politics and economy now and future. While the US as one of the greatest consumers of crude oil in the world, conducted fierce competition with other states in this area with conflicts of interests. Particularly after September 11, the US launched the global strategic deployment with anti-terrorism in which also implies the strategic deployment of crude oil.

That is why some people analyze we cannot rule out the possibility that the eruption of Iraq war also embodies the pursuit of self-interests in energy of the US. The superpower always places the self-interests on the first place, even chooses a war which is illegal, pretending that justice prevails. 4.

Conclusion The realism school seeks the elaboration for the reality of the

world instead of the ideal situation. One point of view goes like that since the establishment of the formal international study in 1919, the realism once dominated the realm of it, because it could give an arguable explanation of wars in the world.

So the author takes the example of a war happened relatively in recent years to elaborate the role of realism school. As to the Iraq war, firstly attention goes to the reason for the start, even though the excuse is not enough the US still conducted its attack. Secondly, the process of the war, from not getting the permit from the United Nations to violate the international law, becoming an illegal war, proves that the US depends on its own strong national power and the leading role in the whole world without the fear for the sanctions and condemnation from other states or the international organizations.

Just like in the argument of realism school, in the law of the jungle, “ power” is a core factor for deciding a state how to behave in the international interaction. Due to the uncertainty to Iraq’s intention, not knowing whether it really holds the nuclear weapons, whether Iraq would use it to do things related to the terrorism, harming the interests and security of the US, the US government decided to take a preemptive war in advance as a rational actor in order to eliminate the potential risks and protect itself.

Meanwhile, The US gives the self-interests a priority and tries to affect other states with its great political and economic influence. Therefore, it is natural for us to get a conclusion that even a war happen today could be conformed to the realism school of the international school. Even after the split of the

Soviet Union, it is still taking the significant position in the international relations study and can explain much situation in the globe, especially for the war.

And of course, even there are more and more international organizations nowadays, but how to ensure they could play the better role in the international community is an urgent problem to deal with the disputes, conflicts and even wars, only by commitment? It still needs to be done more study on that. Bibliography 1. Center for American Progress (January 29, 2004) " In Their Own Words: Iraq's 'Imminent' Threat" Senator Bill Nelson (January 28, 2004) " New Information on Iraq's Possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction Blair, A. (March 5, 2002) " PM statement on Iraq following UN Security Council resolution" 2.

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