



Thomas Kelsey

To what extent have the 9/11 attacks affected the United States political relationship with the Middle East? A comparative study between Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the extent to which the 9/11 attacks affected the United States political relationship with the Middle East. The September 11 attacks conducted by Sunni Islamic extremist network, Al Qaeda, had a significant impact on the US's politics domestically but even more so in the realm of foreign policy. US President at the time, George W. Bush, was under immense pressure to respond but identifying a specific enemy proved to be difficult. This study considers the impact of 9/11 on three Middle Eastern states: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. Drawing upon evidence from academic journals and books, as well as statistical data from official data banks, this study suggests that 9/11 played a major role in negatively altering the US's political relationship with the Middle East. My analysis shows that, of the three case studies examined, Iraq's political relationship with the US was the worst affected by 9/11 and Iran's the least affected. The outcome of this dissertation highlights that the September 11 attacks were a key factor which led to the Bush administration creating a reactionary foreign policy that ignored the political interests of the Middle East. Alongside this, the role of President Bush in leveraging the invasion of Iraq off of the devastations of 9/11 not only dismantled US political relations with Iraq, but also had implications on their political relationships with other Middle Eastern states.

Table of Contents

Contents

Introduction	4
Literature Review	6
Methodology	14
Case Study 1: Saudi Arabia	16
The US-Saudi Political Relationship Before 9/11	17
9/11- The Great Unravelling	18
The Birth of a “strategic relationship”	20
The Dissolution of the Quid Pro Quo: A competing perspective	20
Chapter Summary	22
Case Study 2: Iran	24
The US-Iran Political Relationship Before 9/11	24
9/11: A Missed Opportunity for Reconciliation	27
The impact of Bush’s “Axis of Evil” Speech	28
Chapter Summary	30
Case Study 3: Iraq	31
The US-Iraq Political Relationship Before 9/11	31
The importance of Saddam Hussein in Bush’s decision to invade Iraq	34
The role of Bush’s public speaking in validating the invasion of Iraq	35
Chapter Summary	36
The degree of Impact: Comparing the Damage 9/11 caused to Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq	38
Chapter Summary	41
Conclusion	41
Bibliography	44

Introduction

Benjamin Disraeli once stated, “What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens” (Maynes, 1998: 9). A fitting quote to describe not only the shock attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001, but the impact they had on America’s political relationship with the Middle East. Prior to 2001, the Middle East had been defined by interstate wars and constant political upheaval but remained a region of significant interest to Washington (Sorli, et al., 2005: 141). Since the conclusion of World War II, the flow of oil out of the Middle East has been the United States’ (US) priority in the region. Not only was it necessary for the functioning of military equipment, but the price of oil has been historically linked to periods of recessions in the US (Hamilton, 1983: 229, 237). Consequently, it was important for the US to establish control over its price (Hamilton, 1983: 229, 237). As the 20th century continued, political agendas began to change and although oil remained important, the start of the Cold War meant establishing strong diplomatic relations with Middle Eastern states was necessary to prevent the spread of communism. Throughout this period, the US’s hegemonic ambitions grew, such that gaining political influence around the world was essential to achieving that goal. Subsequently, in the second half of the 20th century, there was a high degree of American interference in the Middle East (Jones, 2012: 208). Some scholars argued that this furthered the political agendas of some of the region’s states, but others countered that the US’s presence was a direct extension of their pursuit for global hegemony.

This dissertation will argue that 9/11 was, to an overwhelming extent, was the most prominent factor that affected the US-Middle East political relationship. It will focus on the relationships between the US and three Middle Eastern states, namely Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. These countries were selected because they each held different political relationships with the US at the time of 9/11 attacks. This study will review the key factors in the

relationship between 1930 to 2010. In order to support my argument, I will draw on the works of key academics in this field; David Ottaway, Kashif Mumtaz Ghumman, Daniel Heradstveit & Matthew Bonham (Ottaway, 2009) (Ghumman, 2002) (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007). I will also examine counterarguments that suggest 9/11 may not have been the main reason for the breakdown in political relations with the Middle East after 2001. I will use Ottaway to argue how the US-Saudi quid pro quo arrangement was breaking down regardless of 9/11 (Ottaway, 2009). Moreover, the threat posed by Saddam Hussein due to his unpredictable nature and supposed pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will also be examined as a counterargument (Halper & Clarke, 2004) (Record, 2008: 67). The only case study to not include an alternative explanation for their change in political relations with the US after 9/11 is Iran. This was because the influence of 9/11 was the sole reason why their relationship deteriorated after 2001.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the working definition of political relationship will be defined using Hans Morgenthau's definition. He refers to political relationships as matters to "likely have an influence on the relation of one state with other states...within the international community"(Morgenthau, 2012: 96). Morgenthau's definition is fitting as it allows a wide enough scope to analyse how Washington's policymaking affected the US Middle East political relationship, as well as some economic factors that also played a key role in altering the US's political relationships.

After examining each case study, the final chapter will focus on comparing and contrasting the changes caused by 9/11 on each state's political relationship with the US. The crossexamination of each case study will find trends in 9/11's influence on each relationship. This study will conclude by reiterating the significant extent to which 9/11 affected the US political relationship with the Middle East. There are two main reasons for this. First, 9/11's

influence in creating a reactionary foreign policy that ignored the best interests of the Middle East caused a rapid deterioration in diplomatic relations. Secondly, its role in validating the 2003 invasion of Iraq was essential. Without it, Bush lacked the legitimacy to implement his long-term plan for regime change in Iraq. Its effects on the region were also instrumental to how other Middle Eastern states engaged politically with the US.

It is important to study the impact of 9/11 on the US political relationship with the Middle East because it redefined global security threats and had international political implications which extended beyond the Middle East. Prior to the attacks, terrorism was present but on a much smaller scale. Never had a state so powerful been hit so devastatingly in its national epicentre. The value of learning about the effects of the 9/11 attacks on the US's political relationships does not therefore lie with the immediate effects of the event itself, but on how the reaction of the US government drastically changed the global political landscape with its policies, the effects of which still resonate today.

Literature Review

Arguably the most devastating act of terrorism in history, literature has shown that the 2001 September 11 attacks had major political repercussions both domestically and in foreign policy. Many studies have exemplified this but have ignored how the 9/11 attacks have specifically altered the US's political relationship with the Middle East. This dissertation aims to fill this void. Given the vast amount of literature written in the field of international relations surrounding the events of 9/11 there was surprisingly limited academic writing on the particular focus of this study. A key factor in my understanding was that the US policy in the Middle East has been based on forging political alliances with states endowed with vast

oil reserves. Yet, there is minimal academia that examines how these relationships, that remained present during the 20th century changed after 9/11. Furthermore, given that the majority of Al-Qaeda's members involved in the attacks originated from Saudi Arabia, I believe it is reasonable to expect a change of attitude from the US towards some states in the Middle East. This thematic literature review will first assess the literature that identifies 9/11 as an influence on political change in the US-Middle East political relationship. Next, it will examine literature which promotes the role of Bush and his administration, as well as the danger of Saddam Hussein, as the catalysts for diplomatic breakdown. Finally, it will assess where there are gaps in the literature surrounding this research question.

To begin, Middle East scholar, David Ottaway, is one of the key academics who argue in favour of 9/11 being the pivotal reason for worsened US-Middle East relations. His 2009 article, "The King and US: U.S.-Saudi relations in the Wake of 9/11" offers a comprehensive account of 9/11's impact on the US-Saudi political relationship (Ottaway, 2009: 121). His main argument centres around Bush's neglect for Riyadh's regional needs before and after the attacks, as well as the fallout from the US invasion of Iraq, increasing Saudi frustrations with the US to irretrievable heights (Ottaway, 2009: 122, 123). Another of Ottaway's articles from 2009, "The US and Saudi Arabia since the 1930's", was also useful in aiding comparisons of the US-Saudi relationship prior to 9/11's impact (Ottaway, 2009: 1). This article further expanded on Ottaway's previous argument that the US-Saudi political relationship had been stagnating under the Clinton administration in the 1990's (Ottaway, 2009: 3). By 2001 the relationship was on thin ice, and 9/11 drew America's focus towards defence strategies and retaliation. Consequently, Saudi Arabia faced further neglect and opted to untwine their relations with the US (Ottaway, 2009: 3). As these articles have been written in 2009, Ottaway has been able to analyse the fallout of 9/11 with the benefit of hindsight and use

additional literature published after the event to strengthen his analysis. This increases the accuracy of his work and therefore provides a useful source of information.

Ottaway's thesis that the US invasion of Iraq caused the US-Saudi political relationship to decline was previously analysed in 2006 by Joyce Ibrahim (Ibrahim, 2006). Using an interview with the Managing Director of the Saudi National Security Assessment Project (SNSAP), Nawaf Obaid, Ibrahim suggested that America's policies in response to 9/11 had unsettled the Middle East further (Ibrahim, 2006). The expansion of Iranian influence in Iraq due to the removal of Saddam Hussein led to Iran's regional growth expanding (Ibrahim, 2006). The fear of Iranian expansionism is a common theme in the literature surrounding this topic. Isiah Wilson III explains in his article from 2007, "Rediscovering Containment : The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct", that the US see Iran as expansionist because of the role in promoting aggression throughout the region (Wilson III, 2007: 104). Consequently, Washington induces policies to nullify their growth as they believe Iran have ambitions to have a hegemonic influence over the Middle East (Wilson III, 2007: 104). Overall, I do not think Isiah III goes far enough in his work to rationalise the fear of Iranian expansionism. Whilst he provides a basis for understanding why the US maybe concerned, particularly after the revolution, he does not expand upon Iran's pursuit of WMD and the effect this had on Washington.

In 2002, researcher for the Institute of Strategic Studies, Kashif Mumtaz Ghumman, analysed the US-Iran political relationship through a different lens. He stated in his article, "Iran-US Relations in the Post 9/11 Days: Problems and Prospects", that Tehran were willing to use the 9/11 attacks as a motive to reconcile their political relations (Ghumman, 2002: 173).

However, Washington remained ambiguous towards Iran's motives for cooperation directly after 9/11 (Ghumman, 2002: 174). They did not trust in Iran's sudden goodwill and thus

killed any chances of reproachment by declaring them as sponsors of terror in Bush's 2002 "Axis of Evil" speech (Ghumman, 2002: 174). Daniel Heradstveit & Matthew Bonham examine the impact of this speech on Iran in their 2007 article "What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran" (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007: 421). This piece of academia deeply explores all facets of the aftermath of the speech on the US-Iran political relationship (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007: 421). It touches on important points that are not so US-centric (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007: 421). Furthermore, it explains the impact of the speech from an Iranian viewpoint which was an important moment in strengthening anti-west sentiment in the Middle East (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007: 421).

The travesty of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a direct consequence of the 9/11 attacks (Riedel, 2021). American expert on US security, Bruce Riedel, wrote a report for the Brookings Institute (American research group) in 2021 reflecting on his time in the Whitehouse whilst the events of 9/11 were unfolding (Riedel, 2021). He argues that Bush was obsessed with Saddam and was "worried" for Iraq as he could see how desperate Bush was to link 9/11 to the Saddam regime (Riedel, 2021). Whilst I would be concerned about the bias of an American report on 9/11, especially from within the Whitehouse, Riedel looks to be delivering an honest account highlighted by his willingness to criticise the Bush administration (Riedel, 2021). Whilst bias cannot be entirely ruled out, his thoughts provide a useful view of the situation from within the Bush administration (Riedel, 2021).

With any academic debate there is an abundance of literature that offers competing arguments. David Mednicoff is the first of a multiplicity of authors (Mednicoff, 2005). In his 2005 article, "The 9/11 Commission Report and American Policy in the Middle East", he argues that there are little US foreign policymakers can do to ease the resentment that Arab and non-Arab Muslims feel towards the US (Mednicoff, 2005: 108). He furthers his analysis

by adding that the “wider problem” for American-Arab relations is that US foreign policy lacks enough creative imagination to produce legislation which eases tensions and enhances global security (Mednicoff, 2005: 108). Literature in this field accredits this issue to President Bush’s stubborn political beliefs. The topic of Bush’s political demeanour was spoken about prominently by Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay in their 2003 article, “The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of America’s Foreign Policy” (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003). One of their core arguments was that Bush was surprisingly ready to “step on diplomatic toes” in order to promote his core beliefs which indicates that Bush himself was an influence in the deteriorating US-Middle East political relationship (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003: 13). The context given to the US’s head policymaker at the time is valuable and it plays a vital role in explaining the rationale for why some policies were created.

Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke in their 2004 assessment of neoconservative influence on US foreign policy, “America Alone”, reiterate the faults of the Bush administration (Halper & Clarke, 2004). The neoconservative presence in Washington linked the terrorism committed by Al Qaeda with the regime of Saddam Hussein (Halper & Clarke, 2004). This was objectively false, but this barrage of neoconservative ideology was able to convince Bush, a novice in foreign policy, into forcing regime change in Iraq (Halper & Clarke, 2004). This has built on the work of Daalder and Lindsay, and therefore furthers the argument for the Bush administration playing a key role in the US-Middle East political breakdown after September 11 (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003: 13). The impact of 9/11 according to Halper & Clarke was no more than an excuse to carry out an already predetermined political agenda. This is a useful insight. The dominant political ideology in Washington at the time of 9/11 would have been a key factor in Washington’s response to attacks. Furthermore, due to Saddam’s role as the aggressor in the Gulf War, Washington had the opportunity to intervene.

However, George W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft in their 1999 publication, “A World Transformed” argued that this would have fractured the US-Iraqi alliance and also come at the cost of human life (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999: 315). The fact America snubbed the opportunity to take military action then, suggests 9/11 was the deciding factor in giving the green light to remove Saddam.

Instead of focusing on Bush’s personal political beliefs, Michael Boyle in his article, “The War on Terror in American Grand Strategy”, specifically refers to the strain Bush’s policies placed on the Middle East after the 9/11 attacks (Boyle, 2008: 191). During his State of the Union Address in 2002, Bush formally labelled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as part of an “Axis of Evil” (Boyle, 2008: 192). This global condemnation alienated the Middle East and worked to strengthen the anti-west sentiment in the region whilst ultimately fragmenting any immediate political relationship between the US and the majority of Middle Eastern States (Mednicoff, 2005: 108). This built on Mednicoff’s thesis, as this exemplified how Bush’s policies did little to curb the anti-west sentiment in the Middle East (Mednicoff, 2005: 108).

K.T. Thomas takes a different approach (Thomas, 2008). In his article “Geopolitics and Energy Security: The US in the Middle East” he argues the movement against Iraq in 2003 was primarily to rid Saddam of power and to pursue long term US goals in the region (Thomas, 2008: 948). His application of the mindset of the Bush-Cheney administration strengthens his thesis. After assessing the works of Halper & Clarke as well as Daalder & Lindsay, it is clear that Bush’s personal politics were a key topic of discussion in academia in the aftermath of the attacks (Thomas, 2008: 948) (Halper & Clarke, 2004) (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003). By Thomas reminding the reader of the US’s commitment to maintain access to oil around the world, it offers a strong argument to why 9/11 may have not been as pivotal in loosening US-Middle East political relations as once thought (Thomas, 2008: 948).

From the research I have conducted into my question I do not feel the literature surrounding this topic is as complete as it could be. Prior to settling on my current research question, I had attempted to implement 9/11's effect on the US-Middle East economic relationship into my answer. By doing this, I felt it would give a more complete account of its affects. Whilst quantitative data is available for the exchange and prices of oil, acquiring economic data around trade for example, proved difficult. This is unhelpful as it prevents academics from analysing the full impact of 9/11 on the US's relationship with the Middle East. Furthermore, when examining the impact of 9/11 on the US's political relationship with the Middle East, I do not feel that the literature goes far enough in stating how America's policies affect the Middle East's citizens. The government to government analysis does not tell the full story when it comes to analysing the political actions of America on the Middle East.

In conclusion, my literature review has examined the key academics who argue in favour of 9/11 being a pivotal factor in altering the US-Middle East political relationship. In particular, David Ottaway and Kashif Mumtaz Ghumman feature prominently in the literature arguing this (Ottaway, 2009) (Ottaway, 2009) (Ghumman, 2002). I have also analysed the academics that argued in favour of the role of Bush and his administration, or the dangers of Saddam Hussein in fragmenting US-Middle East relations. Daalder & Lindsay and K.T. Thomas are among the leading scholars in these lines of enquiry (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003) (Thomas, 2008). Although 9/11 is a well-documented topic much of the focus on relations with the Middle East is directed towards the role and militarisation of oil as opposed to other facets of traditional political relationships. More needs to be written about the impact of 9/11 on the economic elements of the US-Middle East relationship in order for academics to assess the true extent of its damage. In the next section follows an explanation of the methodology as it is important to understand the framework used to answer this question.

Methodology

The focus of this dissertation is to assess the extent to which the 9/11 attacks affected the US's political relationship with the Middle East. This section will set out my research design as well as the limitations of my methodology, before concluding with a summary of my findings.

This dissertation makes use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis on the aforementioned case studies: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. Each study presents a different political relationship with the US in the lead up to 9/11. The countries were specifically chosen because of their differing relationships with the US at the time to provide a more balanced coverage of 9/11's impacts on American political relations in the Middle East. Chapter 6 contrasts and compares the data that I used in each study. I decided to use a separate chapter to make my comparative analysis as clear as possible. This allows me to compare each case study in their respective chapters in direct reference to the question before analysing any trends or contrasts between them.

Most of the data collected will be from qualitative sources. In particular, I have carried out significant research into academic journals, such as *The Middle East Journal* and Foreign Policy Research Institute. *The Middle East Journal* was useful for harvesting qualitative data for the Middle East case studies, whilst the Foreign Policy Research Institute aided the inquiry into western political influences in the Middle East.

To support my main argument that 9/11 was instrumental in altering the US-Middle East political relationship, I also made use of quantitative research. This was necessary to provide numerical evidence to demonstrate that my case studies had become less reliant on the US after 9/11. I gathered this data from official data websites, such as The Observatory of

Economic Complexity, the US Energy Information Administration, the World Bank, and Reuters. In some cases, to enhance my argument, these data sources needed to be supplemented with quantitative data from journalistic articles.

With any set of data, there are limitations. Though I have used an extensive range of qualitative and quantitative data, a small amount has been sourced from lesser academic sources, such as online websites. These websites are credible academic resources as they are operated by academics with political backgrounds, but there is no way to be certain that they write with the same accuracy or authority as the leading authors in my field of research. Consequently, it is difficult to be aware of any entrenched political agendas that may be apparent when interpreting their work. To mitigate this, I have ensured that as much of my qualitative data as possible originates from academic journals, and my quantitative data from official data websites.

To conclude, I have chosen to analyse three different states in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. These states were chosen due to their different relationships with the US by the time of 9/11. This was intended to offer a more balanced answer to my research question. Much of my data has been harvested from qualitative sources, mostly academic journals. However, I have also supplemented this with quantitative data to strengthen some of my main arguments. I have chosen to compare and contrast my case studies in my final chapter in order to clearly state the result of my findings. The main area of limitation in my research is the data collected from sources where I am unaware of any political bias in the authors writing. However, I have negated this by keeping such data retrieval to a minimum and by providing supporting evidence from more reliable sources. In the next section I will begin to analyse my first case study, Saudi Arabia.

Case Study 1: Saudi Arabia

This first case study, focussing on Saudi Arabia, is to transmit the extent to which 9/11 altered the US's political relationship with one of their allies in the Middle East. It would be easy to argue that the US used the September 11 attacks as a catalyst to intervene in states they see as opposed to their political philosophy (this will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters), but since 1945, America have relied heavily on Saudi Arabia. To begin to understand this relationship more fully some historical context must be provided. Before the conclusion of World War II in 1945, no official pre-existing relations had been established, despite the involvement of American oil companies in the Kingdom during the 1930's (Ottaway, 2009: 121). It was not until the end of World War II when US President Franklin J. Roosevelt and Saudi King, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, met on a warship in the Suez Canal to formalise a new political relationship that a partnership began to grow (Riedel, 2020). At the centre of this was oil. On March 3rd, 1938, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) discovered the world's largest resource of crude oil in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (National Geographic Society, 2022). This created a monumental shift in global economics. Saudi Arabia became the world's largest supplier of oil and now possessed a vast amount of political capital on the international stage (Ottaway, 2009: 121). As a result, the US, whose companies aided in the discovery of oil in 1938, struck a quid pro quo agreement with Riyadh offering US military protection in exchange for a reliable supply of oil to US markets (Ottaway, 2009: 124). This case study will begin by examining key moments in the US-Saudi relationship prior to 9/11, beginning with the 1973 Saudi oil embargo on the US, before showing how the Cold War period influenced their relationship. Following this, it will show how 9/11 caused US-Saudi relations to unravel, and how that altered their relationship. The dissolution of the US- Saudi quid pro quo agreement will then be analysed to show how 9/11

was not the only factor responsible for the worsening of US-Saudi relations. A summary of this chapter's findings will conclude the case study.

The US-Saudi Political Relationship Before 9/11

Before analysing the extent to which 9/11 altered the political relationship with the Middle East, it is important to examine the state of the US-Saudi relationship prior to the event. From the 1970's till 2001 key moments can be identified, where it is clear that the US-Saudi relationship was healthy. It will become evident that only an event like 9/11 was likely to change the course of the US-Saudi political relationship.

The stability of the US-Saudi relationship was shown during the 1973 Saudi oil embargo against the US. After his crowning in 1964, King Faisal, who wished to continue US-Saudi relations, issued an oil embargo to punish US for their support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War (Alhajji, 2005: 226). As stated by King Faisal, "America's compete Israel support against the Arabs makes it extremely difficult for us to continue to supply the United States with oil, or even remain friends..." (Medea, 2016: 129). Nevertheless, an amicable solution was reached, thereby demonstrating the value of the relationship to both states. According to Gregory Gause III, in order to reconcile with the US, Saudi Arabia used the wealth generated by raised oil prices during the embargo to purchase US military technology (Gregory Gause III, 2009: 178). In return, and most significantly, once the embargo was retracted, US pressured Israel to negotiate with Syria over the Golan Heights. By 1975 both states had also agreed on a plethora of new economic and military contracts worth up to \$2 billion (Gregory Gause III, 2009: 179). Saudi Arabia continued their good will and argued on behalf of the US to keep OPEC prices stable in the mid 70's when Iran and Iraq were attempting to increase them (Painter, 2014: 196). Though all the evidence shown here

exemplifies the consideration of both states to maintain this political relationship, the US acceptance to go against Israel when they are historically their most important strategic ally in the region goes far in showing how critical the US-Saudi political relationship was.

Moreover, the Cold War era (1947-1991) further highlighted the significance of the US-Saudi political relationship. The 1979 Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan meant joint action was required against the USSR as Saudi politicians became fearful of a wider attack into the Middle East (Collins, 1980: 60). America, staunchly against Soviet expansion recognised this, and coordinated with Riyadh to ship weapons to anti-Soviet mujahadeen rebels. Both states roughly contributed \$3 billion to the effort (Beauchamp, 2016). Significantly, global politics and ideology journalist Zack Beauchamp points out that the money from Saudi Arabia was secretly laundered through a CIA bank account in Switzerland (Beauchamp, 2016). Action US officials never sanction unless deemed vital (Beauchamp, 2016). This strengthened relations further. After Saudi Arabia's decision in 1958 to join Egypt's proSoviet strategy for the second time, to side with the US against the USSR gives a clear indication of the value placed on their political relationship (Hart, 1998: 68). Though siding with America could be aligned with their inherent desires to enhance their regional security, the magnitude of that decision cannot be underestimated.

9/11- The Great Unravelling

The 9/11 attacks were the catalyst for the breakdown in the US-Saudi political relationship. Ottaway's concept of the "special relationship" was "buried in the ashes of the World Trade Centre and Pentagon" (Ottaway, 2009: 121). In the aftermath of the attacks Congress made clear that because 15 out of the 19 hijackers who participated were of Saudi origin, including their leader, Osama Bin Laden, it would be impossible for US-Saudi political relations to

continue to be special (Ottaway, 2009: 121). As stated by Adam Garfinkle in 2001, prior to the attacks, US officials had extensive knowledge of the socioeconomic issues in Saudi Arabia which allowed it to become a breeding ground for terrorism (Garfinkle, 2001: 2). Instead, they opted to remain ignorant so their prosperous political dealings could be maintained. The severe nature of the attacks meant turning a blind eye was no longer viable. My rationale for 9/11 causing the downfall of US-Saudi political relations is twofold. Firstly, the Bush administration were neglectful of their duties to the US-Saudi alliance, and as result of 9/11 disregarded Riyadh. In August 2002, months of frustration came to a head when Prince Abdullah became disillusioned with Bush's objectives in the region (Ottaway, 2009: 122). Instead of paying attention to the Middle East peace process, Abdullah felt the US's attention rested firmly on Israel and their struggles with Palestine (Ottaway, 2009: 122). After Bush gave a damning speech blaming Yasser Arafat (Palestinian leader) for the terrorist activity Israel were experiencing, Abdullah became frustrated (Mohamad, 2015: 90). By 2002, Abdullah wanted to sever ties with Washington to allow Saudi Arabia to take control of their own destiny in the region.

Secondly, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 compounded Riyadh's frustrations with the Bush administration. Carried out as a response to 9/11, the US declared war on Iraq as part of Bush's war on terror but naively ignored the complexities of the three competing religious factions in the Middle East. Nawaf Obaid, the managing director of the Saudi National Security Assessment Project in 2006 best explains the issue (Ibrahim, 2006). The differing representations of different religious factions in each state in the Middle East has a vast influence on regional stability. After the US crippled Iraq by removing its leader, Saddam Hussein, Iran's greatest regional enemy at the time, a previously Sunni regime was replaced by Shiite Islamists (Ibrahim, 2006). These Shiite Islamists had strong political links with

Shiite Iran causing Iranian influence in Iraq to grow strong (Ibrahim, 2006). Sunni's, despite only comprising between 15-20% of the Iraq population, have been their political rulers since the creation of the Iraqi state (Ibrahim, 2006). Consequently, the introduction of a Shiite regime as a by-product of a US led invasion was a devastating blow to Saudi Arabia. Iran's regional power expanded meaning that, even to this day, Saudi Arabia and Iran rival each other for regional influence. Saudi Arabia felt betrayed by the US and the resultant instability they had caused in the region brought about by their 9/11 policies. Consequently, they wanted to have a more regular political relationship rather than be recognised as America's ally in the Middle East.

The Birth of a “strategic relationship”

From 2003 onwards the US-Saudi Arabia political relationship changed directly because of the events of September 11. Bush's war on terror and Al Qaeda's strong presence in Saudi Arabia meant the two governments had been in close contact over counterterrorism matters (Ottaway, 2009: 126). It is quite possible that whilst 9/11 may have caused Riyadh to limit their involvement with Saudi Arabia, realistically their shared interests at the time meant a strategic relationship would remain beneficial to remove Al Qaeda, and nullify their mutual enemy, Iran. As a result of the US invasion of Iraq, Iran's regional power expanded.

Alongside its ambitious WMD programme there was much to be concerned about from a US and Saudi political point of view.

The Dissolution of the Quid Pro Quo: A competing perspective

As the crux of the US-Saudi relationship, the quid pro quo agreement, previously mentioned in this chapter began to dissolve from 2000 onwards. Though its impact may not have been as

crucial as 9/11, it provides a convincing argument for why US-Saudi relations cooled in the aftermath of the attacks. Saudi Arabia were no longer looking to supply US markets with oil and chose to explore new resources of military equipment and technology (Ottaway, 2009: 126). Data surrounding Saudi weapons imports supports this. Beginning in 2001 there is a trend that shows Riyadh's decreasing reliance on US weapons imports. In 2001, Saudi Arabia imported \$25.2 million worth of US weapons compared to 2002 where they imported only \$6.52 million (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022). From 2003 onwards imports from the US increased, which suggests that the 2002 figure might be an anomaly, but after 2001, weapons imported from the US did not usurp pre 2001 spending, when the US-Saudi relationship was healthy (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022). What was also visible after 2001, was the increased number of weapons purchased from European and Asian markets that they had not purchased from prior to 2001 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2022). Evidently, Riyadh were finding new states to buy from to replace the imports they would have received from the US.

From the US perspective, the old agreement was also becoming obsolete. In the years immediately after 9/11, Saudi Arabia began to lose its influence on the global oil market. By the time of US general election in May 2004, crude oil had risen from \$22-28 per barrel to \$40 (Ottaway, 2009: 125). By 2008, the price increased even further to \$147 per barrel (Ottaway, 2009: 125). Evidently, the advantages of the US-Saudi quid pro quo had begun to vanish in the aftermath of 9/11. It may be argued that this was a key component of the US's drive to become self-sustainable regarding energy resources. This appeared to be a clear signal from the US that they had started to move away from their dependency on Saudi Arabia. After the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 energy crisis, America could not keep falling prey to fluctuating oil prices. Until 2005, up to 60% of crude oil consumed in the US was

imported (Yergin, 2013). By 2013 this figure decreased to 35% showing the US's drive to becoming self-sustainable (Yergin, 2013). Most impressively, in 2018, largely due to the shale oil boom in the US and Canada, America became the world's largest producer of crude oil (US Energy Information Administration, 2022). This demonstrates that the US government were conscious of the quid pro quo relationship deteriorating with Riyadh and chose to alter their political approach to protect the best interests of the state. No longer were Saudi Arabia providing a worthwhile deal on the importation of oil so understandably the US required an alternative solution. However, the neglect shown by the Bush administration as a result of 9/11 still proves to be the tipping point in the relationship. History shows that the US and Saudi Arabia have worked hard to reach reconciliation after disputes in order to maintain their relationship, but on this occasion, Riyadh could not be associated with Bush's policies towards the Middle East (Gregory Gause III, 2009: 178). Not only did these policies disregard their Saudi political agendas but also caused mass political instability in the region (Riedel, 2021).

Chapter Summary

After assessing the US-Saudi political relationship it is evident that the 9/11 attacks played a key role in its debasement. Its impact shaped an aggressive foreign policy that disregarded the political needs of Saudi Arabia. By 2002, Riyadh had become disillusioned with Bush's political ambitions as he waged his war on terror whilst disregarding Saudi Arabia's political needs in the region. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 should be seen as the final straw in the US-Saudi "special" political relationship. This was a naive and egocentric policy which championed American exceptionalism over the political circumstances surrounding their allies in the region. Though the dissolution of the quid pro quo provides a valid explanation

for why the US-Saudi relationship deteriorated, Washington's push to remain an ally suggests the 9/11 attacks did not devalue their opinion of Saudi Arabia enough to completely disregard them. On the other hand, 9/11 proved to be the breaking point for Saudi diplomats.

Consequently, the September 11 attacks fragmented the US-Saudi relationship beyond repair and were therefore responsible for altering their political relationship.

Case Study 2: Iran

This next case study focuses on Iran and its aim is to allow for an examination into whether 9/11 changed US political relations with a Middle Eastern state historically at odds with Washington's political ethos. Iran is a key player in the Middle East, and thus amicable political relations would have certainly been of value to the US. Iran's desire to uphold "regionalism" (the development of a strong localised system amongst states within a close proximity) has been key amongst other political issues in Iran's rationale for opposing any US intervention in the region (Legrenzi & Calculli, 2013: 1). Nevertheless, as argued by Ghumman, 9/11 offered a "drastically changed international scenario" which presented mutually beneficial opportunities to achieve political objectives (Ghumman, 2002: 170). The dissolution of the Taliban were at the top of both states' agendas. I will begin by examining the US-Iranian political relationship prior to 9/11, before explaining how the attacks were an opportunity to rekindle the good diplomatic relations experienced under the Shah. To finish, I will argue how Bush's "axis of evil" speech (Ref Bush 2002) was the termination of any potential political relationship with Iran.

The US-Iran Political Relationship Before 9/11

The Iranian Revolution in 1978 signalled an enormous change in US-Iran political relations. It was significant because a pro-western monarchy was overthrown to be replaced by an Islamic Republic (Elwell-Sutton, 1979: 391). The previous regime led by the Shah, was put in place by an MI6 backed military coup and was thus receptive to political interactions with western ideas and economies (Gasiorowski, 1987: 272). The same could not be said for the new Islamic Republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini (Elwell-Sutton, 1979: 406). The Iranian Revolution caused a three way problem for the US.

First, the revolution had a large impact on oil prices. According to Samantha Gross, crude oil production in 1979 declined by 4.8 million barrels per day triggering a price increase (Gross, 2019). By mid-1980 each barrel of oil cost \$34, a significant increase from \$13 in 1979 (Gross, 2019). Under the Shah the US had stability in the global oil markets and a man who would fight on their behalf in OPEC meetings to maintain a fair price for oil. Khomeini strongly differed and wanted to take as much profit from oil as possible. Furthermore, regardless of the US-Iran oil relationship, Iran under the Shah purchased vast amounts of consumer goods from US markets (Gross, 2019). As stated by Gross, for roughly every petrodollar the US spent in Iran, Iran spent two dollars in US markets (Gross, 2019). This showed Iran to be a valuable sponsor of the US economy, especially in the 1960's when the US had amassed a balance of payments issue as a result of overspending on the Vietnam War (Gross, 2019).

Secondly, Iran's strategic position in the Middle East had the potential to be used by Khomeini to attract states also opposed to US hegemony. Its centralised position in the region, close geographical proximity to the Soviet Union and China, and expansive population of approximately 36 million people made it too dangerous a state to fall into enemy hands (The World Bank, 2022). Nevertheless, the US were unable to build good diplomatic relation between 1979 and 2001 because of the impacts of the revolution and therefore were unable to gain any political influence in Iran.

Finally, the strong anti-west sentiment of the Islamic Republic and its close proximity to the Soviet Union and China was a particularly alarming prospect for Washington (Mednicoff, 2005: 111). Knowing they would not succumb to the US's global political vision; the new regime would look to form alliances with other states opposed to US hegemony. Therefore,

the revolution granted Iran the political freedom to counterbalance themselves against the US influence in their state as well as the Middle East.

Alongside the effects of the revolution, there are two more key points of interest in the pre-9/11 US-Iran political relationship. First, the Persian Gulf War in 1991 was key in showing Iran's expansionist objectives (Regan, 1991: 177). The US led coalition which aimed to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and to prevent Iraq from upgrading its WMD programme did not attract the support of Iran (Rowe, 1991: 138). Instead, Tehran opted to maintain their neutrality. Consequently, US politicians believed Iran were planning to usurp Iraq as the dominant power in the region after the country had been destabilised by the invasion (Riedel, 2021). This strongly suggests that Iran's diplomacy in this scenario went against the US objectives in the region and thus worked to derail the pair's political relationship.

Secondly, the intensification of US sanctions on Iran between 1992-1996 exemplifies how US policymakers clamped down on Iran's political agenda. This is useful as it highlights the trend of US suppression against Iran after the revolution and the Gulf War. Due to a lack of political similarities, there was no trust between the US and the Islamic Republic. It was therefore safer to contain their growth especially knowing their ambitions to produce WMD's. The 1992 Iran-Iraq Non-Proliferation Act highlighted this (Pipes & Clawson, 1993: 128). Punishing states deemed to be supporting Iran (or Iraq) in their pursuit of WMD's by removing the US's aid to that country, made leaders choose if they wanted to be considered an enemy of the US (Pipes & Clawson, 1993: 128). Given America's power on the international stage and military capabilities this would be a brave thing to do. The 1995 oil embargo against Iran, and the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (imposed an embargo against any state investing \$20 million or more in Iran's oil or gas sectors) are two further

examples of how the US prior to 9/11 used policies to stunt the growth of Iran's political power (Slavin, 2011: 2) (Kenneth, 2003: 39).

9/11: A Missed Opportunity for Reconciliation

As outlined, US-Iran political relations in the lead up to 9/11 were frail. Numerous policies had been created to prevent the growth of Iran in the global political system. Nevertheless, many academics disregarded the opportunity 9/11 provided for reconciliation in the US-Iran political relationship. In 1997 Muhammed Khatami was elected as the new Iranian leader and immediately reopened diplomatic channels. Speaking shortly after his election, Khatami spoke with great respect towards the US, referring to them as the "Great American Nation" (Ghumman, 2002: 171). This was received well by President Bill Clinton who in return replied, "nothing would please me more than resuming dialogue with Iran" (Ghumman, 2002: 172).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks there seemed to be a push from Tehran to use the tragedy to accelerate a rekindling. Khatami was one of the first world leaders to condemn the attacks, whilst hard-line Iranian media outlets such as Siyasat-e-Ruz mellowed their anti-west agendas in a show of sympathy (Ghumman, 2002: 173). Arguably most surprising was the respect of the Iranian public towards the US. Given their support for the Islamic Revolution it is hard to believe they would feel such sorrow for a country who they felt had acted so imperiously in their region (Mednicoff, 2005: 111). However, this was the case when a minute's silence was observed in the Azadi Stadium (Ghumman, 2002: 173). Given the turbulent history of the two states, there had been no better time to reconcile than in the aftermath of 9/11. A change in political regime in the US upended any diplomatic progress. Unlike Khatami, Bush had no intention to soften his stance towards Iran in the aftermath of

9/11. His approach to Iran only worked to strain the relationship further (Boyle, 2008: 191). Their links to sponsoring terrorism were prominent and were something Bush could not look past. In 1979 an attack on the US embassy in Beirut was a turning point in the US-Iran political relationship (Malakoutikhah, 2020: 914). This caused the US to declare Iran an official state sponsor of terrorism in 1984 (Malakoutikhah, 2020: 914). However further attacks from militant groups linked with Iranian funding such as Hezbollah and Hamas came in 1983, 1992, and 1996, causing US patience with Iran to wear thin (Malakoutikhah, 2020: 914).

Before addressing the aforementioned point, though Iran seemed ready to enter diplomatic discussions, Ghumman makes an important observation. It would be naive to assume Iran's intentions were purely philanthropic (Ghumman, 2002: 174). Since the late 20th century, Iran and the Taliban had been in frequent combat. It is very probable that Iran was attempting to bandwagon America's fury towards the terrorist organisation to aid the assistance of their downfall. Given that Bush paid little mind to considering a renewed political relationship with Iran, it is most likely that Washington saw through Iran's sympathy vote and opted to keep them at arm's length because of their historical ties to terrorist organisations.

The impact of Bush's "Axis of Evil" Speech

On January 20th, 2001, G.W. Bush was formally inaugurated as the US president. Bush did not believe in nurturing the Middle East. Instead, he stuck to his core belief that states were self-interested and would act in their best interest (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003: 13).

Consequently, Bush was sceptical of the ambitions of some Middle Eastern states and questioned, when conducting diplomatic missions, whether their feelings towards the US were pure (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003: 11).

After delivering his 2002 State of the Union Address, hope of any political reconciliation between the US and Iran had been vanquished (Ghumman, 2002: 170). In this speech Bush labelled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as part of an “axis of evil” as these states were perceived to be pursuing WMD’s and sponsoring terrorist organisations (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007: 421). Bush’s global ostracization of Iran served to reproduce the anti-west sentiment in a regime that wanted to begin a stable partnership with the US (Mednicoff, 2005: 111).

Khatami denounced any potential relations with the US as he stated, “when a big power uses a militant, humiliating, and threatening tone to speak to us, our nation will refuse to negotiate or show any flexibility” (Ghumman, 2002: 175). Whilst it appears that the change in US regime was a stumbling block in US-Iran relations, the 9/11 attacks highlights that the political differences between the two states were too vast to overshadow the temporary reconciliation from 1997-2001. Consequently, this demonstrates that 9/11 played a pivotal role in permanently damaging the US political relationship with Iran.

Certainly, Bill Clinton had served his two terms, but it would be unrealistic to expect the next regime, even if they represented Clinton’s views towards Iran, to have changed the future of the US-Iran political relationship. After 2001, the US and Iran still experienced political spats. Iran’s uranium enrichment ambitions perhaps the largest sticking point, but it is a topic which is non-negotiable to the US. The legacy of 9/11’s devastation can be felt in Washington’s stance to dismantle the plans on any state with WMD ambitions.

In comparison to Saudi Arabia, 9/11 had a far greater effect on the US’s relationship with Iran. Despite the September 11 attacks worsening US-Saudi relations, a strategic partnership was born of its ashes as both states had tangible assets to offer one another. Conversely, the looming threat of WMD usage against the US was enough for Washington to outlaw Iran from US politics.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed Iran's political relationship with the US prior to September 11 and has shown how the attacks altered the relationship. Overall, the case of Iran is not surprising.

When analysing the earlier years, it is apparent after the Iranian Revolution that the US and Iran share very little common ground over political matters. Consequently, there is no natural basis for a diplomatic relationship. As time evolved it became clear that the US's main interest in diplomatic ties with Iran stemmed from their fear of WMD's, particularly after the devastations of 9/11. This demonstrates that as an event, 9/11 altered the US political relationship with Iran as it further exacerbated the already fragile trust between the two states. The legacy of the attacks was revealing in the way the Bush administration responded. Despite never being officially linked to the attack, Bush's "axis of evil" implicated Iran's involvement, suffocating any chance of a revival in the US-Iran political relationship.

Case Study 3: Iraq

Iraq's political relationship with the US is the final case study to be evaluated. Compared to Saudi Arabia and Iran, US-Iraqi political relations have not been as thoroughly documented throughout the 20th century. Irrespective of this, Iraq remains useful when highlighting the effects of 9/11 on the US's political relationship with the Middle East. Since the US recognised the Iraqi state in 1930 upon the signing of the Iraq Treaty, much like the case studies already discussed in this essay, their political relationship with the US has undulated (Vesey-Fitzgerald, 1931: 55). An important differential in the case of Iraq is how the US invested an extensive amount of time and resources into attempting to rebuild the country's political infrastructure during the 20th century. This essay will begin by outlining key moments in the US-Iraq political relationship prior to 9/11 starting with the period between 1958-1979 where the US was focused on preventing the spread of communism. Next, this essay will discuss the implications of Saddam Hussein's reign prior to 9/11. It will suggest how the US invasion of Iraq was a direct consequence of the September 11 attacks, but also how Bush's obsession with Saddam was an arguably a more prominent reason for the downturn in political relations after 2001 than 9/11.

The US-Iraq Political Relationship Before 9/11

Significant US interest in Iraq began in 1958 due to the dethronement of the Iraqi monarchy (Jacobsen, 2013: 1029). Political instability was and has continued to be a fundamental problem in Iraq with competing religious factions rivalling one another for political power. Nevertheless, despite being internally frail, to the international society Iraq are a unified state. Their close geographical proximity to the USSR and China meant during the Cold War era the US were fearful over increased communist influence in Iraq. When combining this with

Iraq's stature within the Middle East, the domino effect that may have occurred if Iraq endorsed communism would have been severely detrimental to the US's global hegemonic influence. Consequently, between 1958 and 1979 the US opted to aid Iraq in rebuilding their political infrastructure. Much like Iran's plea to help the US overcome the Taliban in the aftermath of 9/11, the US in this case are being far from philanthropic. By trying to create a politically stable and economically prosperous Iraq, this would prevent them straying into the grasp of communism as their political saviour. The US were successful to a small degree in achieving this. Whilst maintaining diplomatic relations, they managed to dissolve the Baghdad Pact in 1959 so there were no repercussions on Iraq, as well as provide them foreign aid (Sanjian, 1997: 260) .

Despite their initial successes, relations were severed in 1967 due to the US support for Israel in the Six Day War (James, 2012: 60). Resultantly, Iraq turned to the Soviet Union to establish political relations which could improve their militarisation ambitions. This ultimately rendered the American initiatives in Iraq surplus.

The rise of Saddam Hussein to power in 1979 is arguably the most important part of the early US-Iraqi political relationship. It was undoubtedly essential to the deterioration of the relationship after 9/11.

The US's relationship with Saddam Hussein's Iraq pre September 11th should be divided into two phases. The first stems from 1979-1989 where the US supported Saddam as he acted as a barrier to the expansion of Iranian power in the region. After rising tensions between Iraq and Iran, war erupted in 1980 as Saddam ordered an invasion of Iran (Sterner, 1984: 129). By 1987 the US led by President Ronald Reagan had become formally involved, sending the US Navy to protect Iraqi oil tankers under threat from Iran (Kelley, 2007: 45). It is clear from

Americas military involvement, that the support for Iraq originates from planning how to best safeguard their political interests in the region. The price of oil is pivotal in the US's involvement during this period. Throughout the ceasefire negotiations in 1988, Iran only accepted due to pressure from US military forces, highlighting the healthiness of US-Iraq political relations at the time (Kelley, 2007: 74, 82).

However, it could be interpreted that despite Khomeini's Iran being contained during the Iran-Iraq war, it was ambitious to believe from the US perspective Saddam could now lead Iraq into a more politically stable future. His appalling human rights record was an issue that could not go ignored forever and in this case was only overshadowed by the US's fear of Iranian expansionism (Wilson III, 2007: 104). The US's ignorance in order to achieve a short-term victory is somewhat of a trend. After 9/11 the same methodology would be seen but this time against Saddam.

The second phase spanned from 1989-2001. This oversaw Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as Saddam wanted to recuperate the financial losses from the war with Iran (Warbrick, 1991: 482) (Sassoon & Walter, 2017: 610). On this occasion, it was the US's responsibility to deter Saddam from invasion. The US still saw Iraq as an important check on Iranian expansionism and as a result, a state which could balance the Middle Eastern region. George H.W. Bush had an open dialogue with Saddam, suggesting relations were still healthy, but could not convince him to waiver on invading Kuwait. Saddam's failure to heed Washington's warnings likely shortened American patience with Iraq overall. After decades of political aid and direct support for Saddam himself against Iran, it is reasonable to see this as a catalyst for why the US reacted in the manner they did towards Iraq after 9/11. Bush's containment policy was initially successful in maintaining political relations with Iraq despite their clash over Kuwait. A US military presence in Iraq after they withdrew from Kuwait meant Saddam was unable to

launch any further regional attacks, nor threaten his own people. What began in 1958 as a partnership with shared political goals had been overarched by the political agenda of a power hungry dictator. As explained in the next subsection, though neither state saw it coming, 9/11 proved to be the tipping point in US-Iraqi relations (Riedel, 2021).

The importance of Saddam Hussein in Bush's decision to invade Iraq

As stated by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt the “decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein even now seems difficult to fathom...In the aftermath of 9/11, when one would have expected the United States to be focusing laser-like on Al-Qaeda, the Bush administration chose to invade a deteriorating country that had nothing to do with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon” (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 229). The question of why must be asked. The US invasion of Iraq was a turning point in US-Iraqi political relations as the Bush administration aimed to remove the man previous administrations had hoped to be the catalyst for change in Iraq and the Middle East (Riedel, 2021). It may be argued that the strength of the neoconservative ideology in Washington at the time of Bush's presidency was the driving force behind this illogical decision. Stefan Halper and Jonathon Clarke's argument which cites Saddam's pre-9/11 behaviour to be the primary reason for the invasion, and the 9/11 attacks themselves, purely as the justification, supports this argument. (Halper & Clarke, 2004: 206). Halper and Clarke state, “Minds were already made up. A pre-existing ideological agenda was taken off the shelf, dusted off, and relabelled as the response to terror...” (Halper & Clarke, 2004: 206). Bush's receptiveness to this neoconservative agenda was problematic. As a leader, he was inexperienced in the realms of foreign policy and was thus susceptible to suggestions from those around him, namely, vice-president, Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, and National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice.

These were all high-ranking individuals who believed 9/11 could serve as a mandate to rid Saddam of his political standing (Thomas, 2008: 948).

The recklessness of Saddam also allowed neoconservatives in Washington to frighten citizens with the possibility of a WMD attack if the US did not invade Iraq. Understandably, US citizens were terrified in the wake of 9/11, but when military operations against Iraq began in 2003 there was no evidence of Iraq's involvement in the attacks, nor proof of an Iraqi Nuclear weapons programme (Record, 2008: 67). The Bush administration overemphasised the threat of WMD's in combination with Saddam's perceivably uncontrollable nature to promote the idea that the war in Iraq was warranted and to avoid a repeat of 9/11 in the future (Riedel, 2021).

The role of Bush's public speaking in validating the invasion of Iraq

Bush's speeches in the wake of 9/11 not only damaged US relations abroad but were also influencing the US public's opinion of the Middle East. By the advent of war against Iraq in 2003, 70% of US citizens supported the war, but questions arose regarding why a conflict against an illogical enemy was so widely supported (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 525).

Amongst other factors, such as Bush's high approval ratings, and the rally-round-the-flag theory, which would have been triggered by the devastations of 9/11, Bush's usage of the 9/11 attacks during his speeches were key in explaining why US-Iraqi political relations changed after 2001.

This argument can be illustrated in a study from Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner. They have analysed trends in Bush's speeches between September 12th, 2002, to May 2003. In that timeframe Bush addressed US citizens 13 times (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 527) and in 12

out of the 13 speeches, Bush interlinked the themes of terrorism to Iraq or Saddam Hussein, providing the image that those themes were “logical extensions” of terrorism (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 527). In specific reference to 9/11, Bush delivered seven speeches out of 13 with September 11 and Iraq in the same paragraph, with four of those speeches having them in the same sentence (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 527, 528).

There were also elusions to future WMD attacks. In three speeches, Bush spoke about hypothetical scenarios in which the hijackers responsible for 9/11 were provided with WMDs from the Iraqi government (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 528). Furthermore, in an address of March 3rd, 2003, Bush stated, “the attacks of September 11, 2001, showed what the enemies of America did with four airplanes. We will not wait to see what terrorists or terror states could do with weapons of mass destruction” (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005: 528). This demonstrates that Bush was tactical in his usage of the 9/11 attacks and used them to fuel the public opinion which would subsequently validate his plan to remove Saddam from power (Thomas, 2008: 948). It is evident from the data given here that Bush was obsessed with Saddam. His continual linking of Saddam or Iraq to 9/11, despite the lack of evidence supporting this claim, further advocates that Saddam was an important factor in the deterioration of US-Middle East relations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter depicts how the US-Iraq political relationship began to decline as Saddam’s tenure evolved. The American need to act in the wake of 9/11 meant action against Saddam could be validated and thus it was carried out. President Bush played an integral part in this. His neglect for foreign policy meant, in a time when the US needed a leader skilled in foreign affairs, they were given a man who was unable to see the shortcomings of his advisor’s

foreign policies. Bush was heavily influenced by the neoconservative presence in Washington at the time and thus fell prey to the idea that Iraq, in particular Saddam, should feel the full force of American retaliation. The extent to which 9/11 fuelled the disconnect between America and Iraq is vast and ultimately unarguable. Frailties in the relationship were expanding as Saddam became uncontrollable. The September 11 attacks gave the Bush administration the perfect mandate to dismiss of his regime and replace it with a government built around US political values. The counterpoint stipulating Saddam was the main reason US-Iraq relations deteriorated does hold credibility. However, had 9/11 not occurred Bush would have lacked the legitimacy to invade Iraq. Thus, this demonstrates that the devastations caused by 9/11 were the most prominent factor in altering US-Iraqi relations.

The degree of Impact: Comparing the Damage 9/11 caused to Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq

In this last chapter, comparisons will be made regarding the impact of the 9/11 attacks on each case study's political relationship with the US. From the three case studies examined in this dissertation five key findings arise. These are listed as follows.

- 1) *The political differences between the US and Iran were too big to close*
- 2) *The US saw Tehran as potentially dangerous but did not feel the same about Riyadh when most of the hijackers originated from there*
- 3) *US condemnation of Iran in 2002 due to lack of political similarities draws parallels with their relationship with Saddam*
- 4) *Iraq were the scapegoats for 9/11*
- 5) *The invasion of Iraq's influence on the power balance in the Middle East played a large part in fragmenting their political relationship with the region*

The first point states that Iran was the least affected by the 9/11 attacks. The absence of a political relationship with the US after 9/11 is not surprising. As a result of the 1979 revolution the ideological gap created proved too big to reconcile. By the time of the "axis of evil" speech Bush had no intention of trying to re-enter diplomatic relations with Iran. Combining this with their history of sponsoring terrorism, Washington in the aftermath of 9/11 had little option if they chose to punish Iran than to condemn their actions (Malakoutikhah, 2020: 914). This theory ties in with the next point.

The second point introduces a key differential between the case studies, which was exposed by 9/11. This is how clearly Washington believed that the Saudi threat came from its societal problems, not its government, and were therefore comfortable to maintain a strategic relationship after the attacks. In hindsight, given US politicians were aware of this prior to

9/11, not only did their ignorance not pay off because of Saudi national's involvement in the attacks, but in the aftermath, Riyadh were the government pushing to loosen ties (Garfinkle, 2001: 2). Conversely, their view of the Iranian government after the 1979 revolution was perceived to be an obvious threat to US political values. The staunch differences in political opinion between Tehran and Washington from the revolution onwards set the platform for Bush's "axis of evil" speech. When assessing the US-Iran relationship prior to September 11 a political fallout looked inevitable. The hard-line, Iran first, sentiment that swept the country under the Khomeini regime promoted Iranian expansionism across the Middle East, and the supposed accumulation of nuclear weapons threatened a repeat of 9/11 (Wilson III, 2007: 104). The backlash Bush would have likely seen from the US electorate for negotiating with a state embroiled with links to terrorist organisations in such devastating circumstances, was not a risk worth taking. However, as previously mentioned, the US risk assessment of Saudi Arabia meant they could still conduct intergovernmental diplomacy. Maintaining a strategic relationship with Riyadh was meant to prevent Iran's regional growth. In the aftermath of 9/11, Iran, after Afghanistan, were the largest threat to US national security. Consequently, Washington ignored the double standard they were applying by snubbing Iran but not Saudi Arabia, in order to collaborate future checks on Iranian power with Riyadh.

Thirdly, the US's failure to have a significant political influence in Iran shares an almost identical parallel with their relationship with Saddam at the time. By 2001, Saddam had proven during the 1990's that he could not be tamed by the US, nor could his appetite for a WMD arsenal be curbed (Riedel, 2021). As a result, the September 11 attacks heightened Washington's insecurities with the Saddam regime to irreversible levels. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 should be labelled as a response to the threat Saddam posed, not Iraq (Riedel, 2021). Since the 1960's Iraq's fractured political infrastructure and socioeconomic issues had meant they posed little threat to the US national security. Certainly, no more so than Iran. However,

Saddam's erratic politics which at this point were globally recognised meant 9/11 could be used to outlaw the regime.

Of the three case studies examined here, Iraq appeared to be the scapegoats of the 9/11 attacks. Saudi Arabia were still politically valuable to the US despite arguably providing societal conditions for the spread of extremism. Iran's mutual discontent with the US meant they were absolved of Washington's political influence (Garfinkle, 2001: 2). This left Iraq, largely due to Saddam's built-up reputation, to foot the bill of what was ultimately a byproduct of region-wide disillusion with US politics across the Middle East. However, unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran it can be argued that Iraq was always likely to face a US military intervention during Saddam's tenure. The 9/11 attacks brought that date forward by providing the Bush administration a basis to act with force against Iraq. It may be surmised that 9/11 was a false pretence for the invasion, but the US's political relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran were never situations where military activism was the smart policy. Both those states played a pivotal role in the global flow of oil and had large influences in dictating the price. This must not be forgotten when analysing America's actions in the region.

Lastly, the consequences of the 2003 invasion of Iraq on Saudi Arabia and Iran are another example of how the 9/11 attacks altered the US's political relationship with the Middle East. When waging war on Iraq the Bush administration failed to recognise how removing the Saddam regime would alter the balance of power in the region. As referenced in the Saudi Arabia case study, counterproductively, the US increased the regional power of Iran by invading Iraq (Ibrahim, 2006). Not only did this play a part in the deterioration of the US-Saudi "special relationship" as they betrayed their ally, but also gave increased political influence to a state where a year previous they formally announced as direct opposition to the US (Ottaway, 2009: 121). The Bush administration's policies in reaction to 9/11 were at times

thoughtless. Overall, it may be said that when analysing America's role in their changing relationships with the Middle East, their reactionary policies played a large part in fracturing good relationships and exacerbating ones that were already fragile. I do not believe that, as a state, the US were ready for 9/11, and as a result, they were ill-prepared to be successful diplomatically in its aftermath.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out five key findings surrounding the influence of 9/11 on each case study's political relationship with the US. What stands out as a consistent factor in each study was how their discontent for the US came about from Washington's policymaking in the aftermath of 9/11. The Bush administration were rash. The "axis of evil" speech only worked to show America's defiance to the outside world. Ostracising Middle Eastern states that been proven to not be involved in the attacks, whilst attempting to uphold relations with one that played host to 15 of the 19 hijackers was illogical. There is a strong argument that stipulates Washington were not reacting to 9/11 after 2001 but instead used it to validate carrying out their own political agendas. The 2003 invasion of Iraq exemplifies this. It had been predetermined that Saddam had to be removed, and 9/11 provided the greatest alibi (Halper & Clarke, 2004).

Conclusion

The 9/11 attacks are a well-known historical event that caused fundamental changes in US domestic politics and in foreign policy. Nevertheless, as this dissertation has shown its affects beyond America's borders have been profound. In the Middle East I have examined three

states; Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, all of which have had their political relationships with the US negatively altered to varying extents because of 9/11.

Of the three case studies examined, Iraq's relationship with the US was the worst affected by 9/11. Used as leverage, the September 11 attacks validated Bush's desire to invade Iraq and rid Saddam of his leadership. The fact integrating a new regime based on US political values was largely unsuccessful further highlights the withered state of US-Iraqi relations in the aftermath of 9/11. Saudi Arabia were impacted to a lesser extent by the 9/11 attacks. The decline of relations due to the neglect shown by Bush was a result of the focus 9/11 had drawn away from Saudi Arabia. His decision to invade Iraq showed a further lack of compassion for their once ally, as with the toppling of the Saddam regime came the rise of Iranian influence in Iraq. Expanding their regional rivals political influence proved to be the last straw in what was once a special relationship (Ottaway, 2009: 121). Iran had its political relationship with the US altered the least. Since the upturn in anti-west sentiment because of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, US-Iranian relations were unlikely to be reconciled before 9/11, let alone after it. Despite a change to a more US friendly regime in 1997, Bush had little interest in improving the state of US-Iran diplomatic relations. Their persistent links to sponsoring terrorism as well as their ambitions to establish a vast WMD programme were not policies Bush could afford to support after the devastations of 9/11. Once Bush dispelled any chance of reconciliation in his "axis of evil" speech, the chances of future political reconciliation diminished considerably (Ghumman, 2002: 170).

Consequently, it may be concluded that 9/11 altered the US political relationship with the Middle East to an overwhelmingly large extent. From examining all three case studies the impact 9/11 had on creating a reactionary and ill thought-out foreign policy, as well its role in validating the invasion of Iraq were essential to each of the case studies negative downturns

in relations with the US. The only exception to this was Iran because the rivalling political ideologies left too big a void to reconcile. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the counterarguments enlisted in this study contributed to the fracturing of US-Middle East political relations after 2001. Namely, the dissolution of the quid pro quo agreement between the US and Saudi Arabia, the unpredictable nature of Saddam (Ottaway, 2009: 124) (Halper & Clarke, 2004) (Record, 2008: 67). However, they do not overshadow the impact of 9/11 and how that dictated the Bush administration's foreign policy in the aftermath of the attacks. Looking to the future it may be time for the US to act differently if they are to reconcile their political relationship with the Middle East. Before and after the 9/11 attacks, policies towards the region were centred around American interests and did little to appeal to the political agendas of Middle Eastern states. In 2021 the Biden administration took a step back from the Middle East by withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan (Boot, 2021: 1) When Washington next re-engages with the Middle East there are some approaches, they could take to rebuild relations. For example, helping with aid for the COVID-19 pandemic would demonstrate that US influence in the region can be positive. Tunisia, Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan were seeing 1,000 deaths per 1 million people in their populations throughout 2021, whereas the regions wealthier states, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar had fully vaccinated over half their populations (Katulis & Juul, 2021). Furthermore, the US could enhance the Middle East's regional stability whilst curbing it's fears of Iranian expansionism by restarting talks with Iran. Tehran's support for militant groups such as the Hamas and Hezbollah is a constant threat to the regional stability of the Middle East (Katulis & Juul, 2021). By accomplishing this it would show that the US are attentive to the prominent issues in the region and that building political relationships can go hand in hand with achieving their own foreign policy agenda for the good of all.



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