

**America and Iraq at the Brink of War: An Analysis of the War Strategies of the
Proponents and Opponents of the US- Iraq War**

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of civilization man has attempted to master the art of war in order to ensure existence, permanence and/or dominance. War strategies have become increasingly more complicated with improvements in technology and other factors, and have consequently produced a subset of scholars in the fields of economics and political science that specialize in the development of many theories that seek to explain war. The goal of this paper is to focus on specific war strategies and analyze them in the context of the brinksmanship of the US - Iraq war. The main theories that will be analyzed are bargaining theory, balance-of-power-theory, prospect theory, and rational appeasement. The paper will unfold as a debate between proponents and opponents of war. Every pro-war country will not be analyzed in this paper and only the perspective of the US will represent the proponent for war. Similarly, the opponents of the war will not use all countries, but will mainly focus on those countries with the most power and strongest opposition against the war, i.e. China, France, North Korea, Russia and other nations within the UN Security Council. The undecided countries have been excluded from the analysis because of their less active role in the war and there is limited information on them. Iraq has also been excluded because the focus of the paper will be the perspectives of the US and a handful of non-coalition countries. Each side will provide their rationale for either proposing or opposing war in relationship to the specific theories of war. The mission of this paper is to provide a thorough coverage and analysis of the brinksmanship of the war between the US and Iraq within the context of the aforementioned strategies of war.

International policy has an abundance of literature focused on understanding how nations interact with each other in order to promote their own interests. All of the game theory strategies that are discussed in this paper are aimed at achieving peace with war as the last resort. In bargaining theory, the goal is as the name implies: to achieve an agreement and is concerned with the skillful non-use of military forces. (Schelling 1960). Balance-of-power theory has the similar aim of establishing alliances to minimize threats (Waltz 1979:118). Prospect theory offers insight into the poor decision making that makes one undertake greater risks when faced with potential losses than when faced with potential gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). This violation of the expected utility theory sheds light on why some countries that are in a favorable position are risk averse while other countries that are in an unfavorable condition are risk seeking (Levy 1997). Rational appeasement is based on strategically avoiding certain conflicts in order to save

resources for larger battles and deter any imminent opponent (Treisman 2003). Each theory will be further discussed within the data/information section.

METHOD

Some of the information concerning the US - Iraq conflict did not come from journals but from major media sources such as newspapers, magazines and interviews because the current post Gulf War conflict is so recent. The primary source of information was the Lexis-Nexis Academic database, which provides broad coverage of those sources. However, several of the war strategies have been around for quite some time and www.jstor.org was used to locate the original articles that discuss the theories. Professor Treisman provided an unpublished and working paper on his proposition of rational appeasement. The University of Maryland at College Park Library System provided any other sources.

DATA

A detailed description of each of the war strategies will be provided in this section of the paper.

Bargaining Theory

Bargaining theory is concerned with a process in which players try to reach an agreement through a negotiation process. Bargaining theory has several factors that influence its outcome. The first one is friction, which is the cost associated with the negotiation process. It is most closely associated with the level of patience of the players. A basic source of the player's cost from negotiating comes from the fact that negotiation consumes time and time is valuable. Usually, the player with more patience has greater bargaining power. Another potential source of friction in the bargaining process comes from the possibility that negotiations might breakdown into disagreement due to uncontrollable factors. If there is a higher profit following a breakdown in negotiations, then the player's bargaining power is higher. Another determinant of the outcome is access to outside options. Outside options can only increase the bargaining power if and only if the option is sufficiently attractive. Commitment tactics involve a negotiator taking actions prior to and/or during the negotiations that partially commit him to some favorable outcome. Additionally, asymmetric information influences bargaining outcome (Muthoo 2000).

Balance-of-Power

A balance-of-power theory, properly stated, begins with assumptions about states: They are unitary actors, who, at a minimum seek their own preservation and, at a maximum drive for universal

domination. States achieve this balance either through internal or external efforts. Internal efforts involve increasing military strength and economic capabilities. External efforts involve enlarging one's alliance or diminishing opposing countries. Balance-of-power theory is similar to market system theory because actions and interactions of units are based on assumptions about behavior. The theory makes assumptions about interest and motives rather than explaining them. It is a self-help system where those that do not help themselves or who do so less effectively will fail to prosper. The theory states that for those that do well, other will emulate or suffer (Waltz 118). Essentially, states establish non-permanent alliances to promote their interests.

Prospect Theory

Kahneman and Tversky (1979) analyzed several classes of choice problems in which preferences systematically violated axioms of the expected utility theory. These observations showed that utility theory is an inadequate model and they proposed an alternative model called prospect theory. The theory is mainly concerned with decisions that individuals make while faced with risk. There are several terms and phenomena central to prospect theory. The central analytic assumption of prospect theory is that individuals are more sensitive to relative changes than absolute changes, which is termed *reference point*. The fact that individuals overvalue losses relative to comparable gains is called *loss aversion*. One implication of loss aversion is that people treat the costs of moving away from the status quo as losses and the benefits of moving away from status quo as gains, and then overweight the former to the latter, people stay at the status quo more frequently than expected utility theory predicts (Levy 1997:90). The asymmetry between losses and gains is manifested not only in loss aversion but also in *risk orientation*. People tend to be risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses, which is called the *reflection effect*. Changes in the reference point can result in changes in preferences. The expected utility theory posits a linear combination of utilities and probabilities, prospect theory posits that utilities are weighted by a function that is nonlinear in probabilities (Levy 1997:92).

Rational Appeasement

Many scholars have argued against appeasement citing that yielding to a threat is equivalent to welcoming more extortion. From Thucydides to Machiavelli to modern economists, many have argued against the effectiveness of appeasement (Treisman 2003:4). Treisman's argues that appeasement has

received too much criticism and that the standard treatments leave out the one factor crucial to international politics – resource restraint. He states that if resources are limited and a state faces many potential threats, appeasing one challenger may actually increase a state's ability to deter others. If even highly resolved incumbents rationally appease, observers do not impute low resolve to those who do so. Refusal to appease can undermine the state's deterrent because fighting drains enforcement resources associated with battle (2003:1). There are two types of appeasement: reactive appeasement reduces existing conflict and anticipatory appeasement prevents potential conflict (Keltner et al 1997:362). Rational appeasement can be viewed as a survival strategy because of its reliance on the amount of available resources and selective engagement.

ANALYSIS

Bargaining Theory

Pro-War

Bargaining theory is based on how players will reach an agreement. It was impossible for the US and Iraq to reach an agreement because various factors that affect a positive bargaining outcome were violated. The main determinant of bargaining theory is friction, which is loosely defined as the cost of negotiating. Most negotiations are not frictionless because at least one side has something vested in reaching an agreement by a particular time. The cost to the US in the bargaining process with Iraq was considerable because of the threat global terrorism. The longer the US waited for Iraq to comply with UN 1441, the more time Iraq could buy to harbor and strategically conceal its weapons of mass destruction. There was plenty of intelligence that suggested Iraq had these weapons and the US grew increasingly concerned over Iraq's ability to threaten its security and status as a powerful nation. As a result, the friction was too intense for bargaining to occur and the eventual process broke down.

There are other determinants of bargaining theory that affect outcome such as outside options principle (OOPS) and commitment tactics. OOPS states that outside options do not necessarily increase one's bargaining power (Muthoo 2000:11). In the US-Iraq situation the outside option would have been for the US to threaten another nation such as North Korea and use the results of that hopefully successful interaction as added incentive for Iraq to cooperate. The fact is that the US had much more at stake with Iraq than any of its outside options because of the over \$75B in oil imports from Iraq (World Almanac.

2002:219). Therefore, no other nation deemed as attractive as an outside option. President Bush made numerous addresses to world that he would act regardless of the actions of others. It is best summed by this statement where he said, "The course of this nation does not depend on the decision of others. Whatever action is required, whenever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people" (Glenn 2002). President Bush continually made commitments to use force to remove Saddam Hussein and thus was partially committed military actions. These partial commitments eroded the bargaining process and contributed to the war.

Bargaining theory results in war when information is not complete and there is a lack of commitment. The US felt that Saddam Hussein was extremely unreliable and that he would neither abide by commitments nor provide necessary and accurate information. Bargaining process is a theory of the skill non-use of military weapons (Schelling 1960). However, there are many determinants that lead the players away from war that were nonexistent in the US-Iraq war it became inevitable that the US would have to use military force with Iraq.

Anti War

According to Robert Powell, "Bargaining theory takes its cues from rational-choice modeling in economics, which emphasizes the cost-benefit decisions made by self-interested actors in a given system." Cost-benefit analysis was a central element of the negotiations process between the non-coalition countries and the US. France, Germany, Syria, China and Russia were opposed to the war for a number of reasons. One is Iraqi oil. These countries had big oil contracts with Iraq, which provided a large source of income. According to Jean-Pierre Cabestan, director of the Hong Kong-based French Center for Research on Contemporary China, it would cost Beijing as much as one billion dollars. Russia wanted to safeguard their oil contracts as well worth billions of dollars, but their main concern was recovering some eight billion dollars owed by Iraq in the Soviet-era debt. War would result in large economic losses to these countries. Additionally, the opposing countries were concerned that going to war with Iraq may lead to other wars, such as with North Korea who claims has nuclear weapons.

The main goal of Resolution 1441 was to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction with the inspections process at the forefront of all solutions. War was the absolute last resort after exhausting all options. The US agreed to inspections, but had very strict conditions: Saddam Hussein fully cooperates and

turns over all weapons of mass destruction or documented evidence that they were destroyed. At first there was very little cooperation by Saddam, but he increasingly cooperated more as time passed. In Hans Blix's last report to the security council, he noted that there was significant progress in the inspections process and believed that the inspections process could make more progress and fully disarm Iraq if given more time (Blix 2003). He also noted that one cannot say for sure how long it will take the inspectors to fully disarm Iraq, but he consistently provided reassurance that a peaceful solution was achievable. During his last report in the UN Security Council he stated, "Even with a proactive Iraqi attitude induced by continued outside pressure, it will still take some time to verify sited items, analyze documents, interview relevant persons and draw conclusions. It will not take years, nor weeks, but months." It is feasible that within the next several months Saddam Hussein would have provided the necessary documents and cooperation to avoid war and save the lives of civilians and soldiers. Iraq bargained for more time and was willing to fund the inspections process for however long it would take. French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin said, "We are facing a difficult crisis, Saddam Hussein is a dictator. So we knew before creating Resolution 1441 that disarming Iraq is not like disarming South Africa. It takes time. Each situation is different" (2003). However, the inspections process was not effective enough for the predatory and bellicose US. The US failed to consider this circumstance with the patience needed to prevent war and chose a path of destruction.

So why did negotiations fail? Why did the US not allow more time for inspectors when disarmament was possible thru that process? Time was not on the side of US. The longer the wait for war, the weaker the case is for war. The inspections process was working and was bound to make more progress with time, as a result, war would not be necessary. The US wanted to move quickly to war before more disarmament would take place and justify their means for war. Secondly, the US did not trust Saddam Hussein. The absence of commitment equals the absence of negotiation. The US showed no flexibility when it came to negotiations and as a result the negotiations were doomed to fail.

Balance-Of-Power Theory

Pro-War

According to balance-of-power theory, war is the result of some disruption of balance in the strategic alliance of nations in the system. Currently, the system is a unipolar one, where there is exactly

one superpower: the US. Ambitions of rising nation cause conflicts with the unipolar power. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can be seen as the beginning of an ambitious attempt to rise up the imperialistic ladder. The US has an optimal position because it can either abide within the rules of balance-of-power theory or it can defy them. If the US abides by the theory, then it can build alliances with other countries that view Iraq as a threat such as the U.K and Australia. Countries that align with the US are making the strategic decision to align with a superpower in the hopes of reaping the benefits of a victorious battle and hoping to ascend in the system but are conversely and simultaneously ensuring that the US increases its gap among other nations and remains the sole superpower. States will engage in this type of balancing even if the end product is not a balanced power (Waltz 1979:128).

Balance-of-power theory is strongly correlated to the notion that no one will become a dominant force, however with the fall of the Soviet Union the US has risen to become that dominant nation. Hence it can employ a dominance strategy and supercede the boundaries established by the theory. The US has enough resources to launch a unilateral attack on Iraq because of the severe handicap of Iraq's alliances relative to the strength of the US. However, it should be noted that Iraq's oil reserves renders it to be a dominant country in the Middle East parallel to the dominance of the US relative to the world. The result is a conflict whether the US uses reasoning of balance-of-power theory or not because Iraq posed a potential threat to the balance of system.

Anti-War

Balance of power theory describes a dynamic equilibrium that countries establish to ensure their own existence and minimize conflicts. The equilibrium is dynamic because the alliances are constantly changing. France, Russia and Germany have been long-time allies of the US and fought the together in the first Gulf War. However, this time around these countries united against the US. Balance of power posits that countries will align to deter the astronomical rise of a dominant nation and that accurately describes the behavior of the non-coalition countries. The dominance of the US creates more resistance for each country to achieve and promotes its own political, economic and military hegemony. Non-coalition countries reacted too late the threat of the global superpower of the US. In essence, the true threat to global security is that country that is allowed to act unchecked.

Balance of power failed in this case because of the superior power of the US. It was still able to wage a successful war despite tremendous unified opposition from non-coalition countries. The realignment of these nations did little to deter the efforts and momentum of the US from its path of attacking Iraq. Non-coalition countries hoped that their unified resistance would prove to be an effective means to deter the US from war and force it to exercise non-military options for disarmament such as the inspections process. The alliances of these countries should have served as an adequate message to any nation to abandon military use, however, the non-coalition countries acted too late in an effort to prevent a disastrous war.

Prospect Theory

Pro-War

Prospect theory is primarily concerned with the reference point of the player. The US is arguably the only superpower in the world and hence has an absolutely superior military to other countries. However, there were war hawks that perceived that saw the US in a perilous state post September 11. As a result, these officials saw the status of the US being threatened and demonstrated behavior consistent with the status quo bias where players tend to stay near status quo. The pro-war constituents reasoned that the US would be more logical to undertake a war with Iraq rather than be perceived almost certainly as passive if it permitted the seemingly ineffective UN inspections. Prospect theory lends that individuals tend to move towards behavior that have a probability of loss rather than accepting with certainty a loss even if the expected loss is greater for the probable loss than the expected loss for the certain loss. This demonstration of the reflection principle is consistent with the by the US to engage in war.

The US perceived its losses in not going to war as much greater than the gains of not going to war. The losses were the potential of future terrorism, greater instability in the Middle East and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. With respect to strategic interaction, it is easier to deter an adversary from taking action than to compel him to terminate an action or to undo what he has already done (Levy 2000:93). The US agreed with this line of reasoning and chose to engage in war now rather than wait until Iraq had an opportunity to galvanize its weapons of mass destruction and commence a sequence of military attacks.

Anti-War

In this case, the opposing countries were not inclined to move away from the status quo position of relative comfort and accustomedness with Iraq. For them, the loss of moving away from status quo outweighed the gains of standing by the US. The major loss for them would have been their oil contracts with Iraq, which equates to significant economic losses. China is one of the biggest importers of oil from the Middle East, especially from Iraq. Additionally, countries feared that the US led war with Iraq would give additional leverage to the US to control oil (Parry, 2003), therefore risking their stakes with Iraqi oil.

There were various other factors that show why war was not the best solution. Many of the non-coalition countries are more sensitive to change from status quo because they would be more greatly effected by the change than a distant country such as the US. The closeness of the non-coalition countries to Iraq makes war even more unattractive. They would rather encounter possible problems with the current status quo position, than encounter the certain problems that stem from a US-controlled Iraq. Movement away from the status quo would produce a shockwaves of problems throughout Eastern Europe and the non-coalition countries did want to contribute to the disturbance of the existing status quo.

Rational Appeasement

Pro-War

The premise of rational appeasement is that a nation has a limited amount of resources that should be conserved for a larger potential battle. The US is in an optimal situation because there it has a great deal of military resources. The US has defense expenditure of \$291.2B, which is about five times the amount of the next highest country-India, the second most active duty of 1.37M troops, the most submarines at 73, and the most navy aircraft carries at 12. (World Almanac 2002:207). As a consequence, the US does not need to employ rational appeasement with its conflict with Iraq. Iraq poses as a threat to the US because intelligence continues to report that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yielding to Iraq's threat would provide a gateway for other countries to develop WMD and threaten the security of world. It was necessary for the US to use military force to neutralize a potential intensified conflict with Iraq and to maintain its status and reputation as the leader of the modern world.

Appeasement for the US in the Iraq conflict would have been irrational conversely appeasement with North Korea can be seen as rational. The strategy here would be to deter a potential conflict with North Korea by executing a strategically humiliating defeat for Iraq to intimidate it. North Korea has the

fourth largest active duty with 1.1M troops, but it has the largest number of reserves than any nation with 4.7M. North Korea did not pose as large a threat as Iraq because there are other countries in Asia that can check North Korea whereas Iraq was unchecked strength in the Middle East. A state's motive to fight should depend also on the bellicosity of future challengers (Treisman 2003:29). The US would have been unwise to engage in a war with North Korea, which would have been more challenging and seemingly more avoidable than a war against Iraq.

Anti-War

Rational appeasement is an effective means of deterrence as long as a country maintains its reputation. Scholars have found only sketchy evidence that states that fail to fight a challenge are judged irresolute (Treisman: 4 2003). Hence the non-coalition countries did not view their decision to not fight as certain damage to their reputation. Rational appeasement mainly involves concessions to prevent war and the non-coalition countries viewed that time was the crucial element of concession. Many times countries engage in secret agreements or other tactics to avert wars.

It is sometimes more prudent for countries to save their resources for bigger battles and locally dominant states often can make that choice without injuring their reputations for toughness (Glenn 2002). The non-coalition countries rejected any military action against Iraq mainly because they did not think Iraq was an eminent threat, therefore resources should be channeled towards the greater battle against terrorism. The largest threat is terrorism and the non-coalition countries viewed that attacking Iraq would create more fuel for terrorist. In effect, the rational appeasement strategy was to patiently use the inspections process with Iraq while using more aggressive efforts with known terrorists. Rational appeasement by the non-coalition countries was aimed at minimizing conflict with neighboring and non-threatening Arab countries in order to diminish any possibility of exacerbating the battle with terrorism. French Foreign Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin said, "It might be difficult to find peace in the Middle East tomorrow after the use of force because of more humiliation, the feeling of injustice will be stronger, more terrorism" (2003).

CONCLUSION

There are many theories that seek to explain the behavior of nations during the brink of war. Four of those strategies were discussed in this research paper. These theories are simply theories and it is very

difficult task to apply them to every international conflict due to the many complexities of each conflict. As we have shown, these theories had little affect on the outcome of the war because essentially nations will act according to their interpretation of a specified threat or mission not some abstract theory concerning payoffs and so forth. The penetration of these theories into the hands of Pentagon officials is very low, and as these theories are becoming more refined, they will be used by a wider audience of practitioners (Glenn 2002). So far these theories give understanding on how nations interact when faced with the question of existence and dominance, but offer conflicting insight that explains effective means of achieving those goals. These theories are models that have been developed based on certain data sets and no one theory can fit every set. In mathematics, there are absolute equations that explicitly explain how to operate on variables. However, in the world of international conflicts there are no absolute equations, only preliminary models that we hope become more accurate so that we may eventually understand how man can exist in peace.

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