

## United States Strategy toward Iraq : From Direct Intervention to Withdrawal



استراتيجية الولايات المتحدة تجاه العراق: من التدخل المباشر إلى الانسحاب

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#### **المخلص**

تتناول هذه الدراسة استراتيجية الولايات المتحدة في العراق في فترة 2003-2011 تعتبر هذه المرحلة حاسمة في استراتيجية الولايات المتحدة تجاه العراق. اذ حددت مسار التدخل الامريكى في العراق خلال سنوات اللاحقة. تتعمق الدراسة في دراسة التحول من الغزو المباشر 2003 الى عمليات مكافحة التمرد، و بناء المؤسسات، و القارات المتخذة انذاك. فضلا عن نتائجها التي ادت الى انسحاب القوات الامريكية 2011 خلال هذه الفترة برزت تناقضات و الاختلافات في الاستراتيجية الميريكية ، مما اثر على الخيارات الاستراتيجية الامريكية للتحقق المتعلقة بالعراق.

تسعى هذه الدراسة الى الاجابة على السؤال الجوهرى حول اسباب التحولات الاستراتيجية للولايات المتحدة تجاه العراق بين عام 2003-2011. تتناول هذه الدراسة كيف تحولت اهداف

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الولايات المتحدة من تغيير النظام، الى الاحتلال ثم التركيز على الاستقرار ثم الانسحاب. كانت هذه الاستراتيجية استجابة كانت بمثابة استجابة لوضع الامني ، و الصراع الطائفي ، و ضعف المؤسسات فضلا عن الضغوط الداخلية في العراق التي اثرت على استراتيجية المريكية. و رغم ان الدراسة تجادل بأن بعض جوانب الاستراتيجية كانت منطقية في ضوء الواقع العراقي، الا ان مسارها العام كشف عن اهداف متضاربة و غياب خطة لما بعد الحرب . و قد ادى ذلك الى الغموض في الاستراتيجية الامريكية و حالة من عدم اليقين استمرت الى فترة طويلة في العراق. و تناقش الدراسة مدى منطقية استراتيجية الامريكية و عملية صنع القرار فيما يتعلق بالتدخل و تغيير النظام، والتقلبات التي طرأت على هذه الاستراتيجية.

### Abstract

This study examines the United States strategy in Iraq IN the period 2003-2011. This phase is considered the most crucial in the U.S strategy toward Iraq, as the direction of U.S involvement in Iraq in subsequent years. The article delves deeply into the transition from the invasion and the direct invasion of 2003 to counterinsurgency operation, institution building , and the decisions made at that time, as well as their consequences leading to the U.S withdrawal in 2011. During this period the contradictions and inconsistencies within the U.S strategy became apparent for the first time, influencing subsequent U.S strategic choices regarding Iraq.

In this study attempts to answer the fundamental question of the reasons behind the strategic shifts in the U.S between 2003-2011. It examines how U.S objectives shifted from regime change to occupation, then to a focus on stability, and finally to withdrawal the strategy was a hesitant response the the security situation, sectarian conflict, and weak institutions as well as to internal pressures in Iraq that influenced US strategy. Although the study argue that some aspects of the strategy was rational in light of Iraq reality, the overall trajectory of the strategy revealed conflicting objectives and a lack of post war plan. This led to ambiguity in U.S strategy and prolonged state of uncertainty in Iraq. The article discusses the rationality of U.S strategy and decision making regarding intervention and regime change , and the fluctuations in U.S strategy .

### Introduction

Between the period between 2003-2011, the U.S strategy in Iraq went through several phases. Particularly after the direct invasion, the U.S then attempted to build state institutions through constitutional reforms and consolidate democracy through elections, in addition to assisting security





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forces in establishing order. However the insurgency quickly escalated, leading the U.S strategy to shift towards counterterrorism and focus on achieving stability, especially during the period of terrorist growth in Iraq. This then transitioned to a phase of gradual withdrawal, culminating in the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement and then complete military withdrawal in 2011, the phases, or strategic priorities, illustrate the U.S strategy and its ongoing evaluation of adapting tools and objectives.

Between 2003-2011, the U.S strategy in Iraq unfolded in several phases. Particularly during the initial phase of direct military occupation, the subsequent phase focused on institutions-building through constitutional reforms and the consolidation of democracy through election, in addition to assisting security forces in establishing order. However the insurgency quickly escalated, leading the U.S strategy to shift towards counterterrorism and prioritize achieving stability, especially during the period terrorist growth in Iraq. This then transitioned to a phase of gradual withdrawal, culminating in the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement and a complete military withdrawal in 2011. The phases, of strategic priorities, illustrate the U.S strategy and its ongoing evaluation of adaptive tools and objectives.

This period was not strategically coherent for the United States, as it revealed fluctuation in declared objectives and the Iraqi reality, in addition to political pressure, regional dynamics, and the mechanisms used to implement the U.S strategy this shift of the U.S strategy from 2003-2011 raises a number of fundamental questions about the rationality of the U.S decision-making process. Were these strategic fluctuations a rational outcome of the conditions on the ground, or did they reveal ambiguity in the structure of United States decision- making ? to what extent were U.S objectives, such as democracy, security, and regional conflict, fluctuating among themselves, leading to fluctuations in the course of United States strategy in Iraq ?

The effects of the period between 2003-2011 extended beyond this specific timeframe, impacting security and institutions, and contributing to country long-term instability. This led to fluctuations in U.S strategy. Therefore a deeper examination of this crucial period in essential not only for clarifying in U.S strategy during this time but also for explaining the broader relationship between the United State and Iraq in the later period. This study examines U.S strategy from direct intervention to military withdrawal. It aims to assess the speed of U.S decision-making during this exceptional period and to place this period within the broader debate surrounding the rationality of the shifts in U.S strategy toward Iraq.

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**Research objectives :** this research aims to delve into the evolution of the United States strategy towards Iraq between 2003 and 2011. It examines the political, strategic, security, and economic costs of the intervention and the post-war decisions, occupation and withdrawal, and assesses the degree of coherence and rationality in the U.S strategy during this period.

**Research significance:** studying the U.S strategy toward Iraq between 2003-2011 is crucial for understanding U.S intervention in Iraq and Middle East and its post 9/11 strategy. Politically the research delves into how U.S policy objectives shifted from regime change and stabilization to withdrawal strategically, it focuses on the impact of post 2003 decisions on stability and internal order in Iraq. Analyzing this period is fundamental to understanding the fluctuations in U.S strategy and their repercussions in Iraq and the region.

**Research Problem:** the research problem focuses on posing a set of questions: what was the main aim that motivated the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003 ? to what extent are these stated aims consistent with the policies adopted after the war ? how did decisions after 2003, such as de-Baathification and the dissolution of the Iraqi military affect stability in Iraq ? what were the strategic motives that led to withdrawal in 2011 ? and to what extent did the U.S decisions reflect a coherent, rational decision-making process ?

**Research Hypothesis:** this study assumes that although modifications and changes in U.S policy, such as the 2007 troops surge and partial withdrawal, were a logical response to the changing security reality, the overall U.S strategy during the period 2003-2011 was effected by conflicting objectives and a lack of clear post – invasion planning. Which led to institutional weakness in Iraq and long-term instability.

**Research Methodology:** this research adopted historical, descriptive, analytical, and qualitative approaches to study the U.S strategy toward Iraq 2003-2011. It relied on official U.S documents such as the National Security Strategy, coalition Provisional Authority order, and the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement, in addition to academic studies, memories of U.S decision makers, and the series of interviews with high-level Iraqi political and military figures to provide additional insights to this study. These sources were analyzed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the development of the U.S strategy during this period.

**Research Structure:** the research comprises four main sections. The first section addresses the justifications and declared objectives of the 2003 intervention. The second section examines the none-clear motives and debates the rationale for the invasion. The third section focuses on



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the evaluating the post-2003 decisions, particularly the de-Baathification process and the dissolution of the Iraqi army. The fourth section focuses on the logic and justifications behind the U.S withdrawal between 2009-2011.

### 1.The Period of Direct U.S Military intervention (2003-2011)

The U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003 is known as decisive turning point in both Iraqs modern history and the evolution of U.S. foreign policy doctrine. It shift from long-standing strategies of containment toward a more assertive approach centered on preemption and regime change. Although the intervention was show it as a necessary confrontation to perceived security threats, its achieving exposed significant gaps between strategic intentions and post war planning. Examining this period is necessary for understanding how external intervention, institutional dismantling, and policy miscalculation contributed to iraq's subsequent instability and long-term conflict.

#### 1.1 Weapons of Mass Destruction as the Prime Justification

The primary justification for the intervention was the assertion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. following the September 11,2011 attacks the bush administration contended that the United States could not afford to allow a hostile regime to possess such weapons or to transfer them to terrorist organization. George tenet, who was the director of CIA at the time, indicated that U.S intelligence evaluations period to the 2003 invasion of Iraq determined that Iraq still retained chemical and biological weapons and was marketing effort to revive its nuclear program. in his memoir he later remarked that "Baghdad had chemical and biological weapons and was actively pursuing nuclear weapons"<sup>(1)</sup>.

These evaluations contributed to the conviction within the administration that Iraq posed an immediate and unacceptable threat in his 2010 memories, President George W. Bush stated that Saddam Hussein "had used WMDs before, supported terrorism, and showed no remorse or change in behavior"<sup>(2)</sup>. likewise, secretary of Defense Donald Ramsfeld asserted in his post-war memories published in 2011 that Iraq represented a combination of two threats : hostile intentions and ongoing effort to reconstruct weapons of mass destruction<sup>(3)</sup>.

From this perspective, waiting or relying on containment was seen as to risky. preemptive action therefore appeared to policymakers as a logical and necessary response to what they viewed as an intolerable security threat, as outlined in the U.S. national security strategy which emphasized preemption against emerging threat<sup>(4)</sup>.

From this perspective the interviewee with high Iraqi military official argues that narratives related to weapon of mass destruction functioned



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largely as justification for intervention rather than as components of a clearly developed post-war strategy<sup>(5)</sup>.

The credibility of the weapon of mass destruction justification was significantly weakened by post-invasion investigations conducted by U.S.-led bodies. The Iraqi Survey Group tasked with assessing Iraq weapons capabilities after 2003, concluded in its final report that Iraq did not possess stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons at the time of invasion and that its nuclear weapons program had been effectively terminated in the early 1990s. Charles Duelfer, who led the Survey Group, emphasized that Iraq's WMD capability had deteriorated substantially and no longer constituted an imminent threat, contradicting the central premises that had underpinned the decision to invade<sup>(6)</sup>.

This discrepancy between pre-war claims and post-war findings prompted later acknowledgment by senior U.S. officials that intelligence assessments had been flawed. In a 2005 speech, George Tenet accepted responsibility for intelligence failures, stating that U.S. judgment regarding Iraq's weapons programs had been wrong and that key assumptions were not adequately challenged within the intelligence community. Scholarly assessments have since argued that the WMD narrative functioned primarily as a mobilizing justification rather than as a foundation of a coherent long-term strategy, reinforcing that argument that the invasion was driven more by perceived urgency and worst-case assumption than verified empirical evidence<sup>(7)</sup>.

### 1.2 Terrorism

In addition to WMD concern, terrorism played a key role in justifying the invasion. Although direct operational cooperation between Saddam Hussein's regime and al-Qaeda was limited, the Bush administration argued that Iraq belonged to a broader category of "rogue states" that supported terrorism. In official statements and presidential addresses delivered in 2002 and early 2003, Iraq was portrayed as a regime with a history of supporting terrorist organizations and as a continuing security threat in the post-9/11 context<sup>(8)</sup>. From the perspective of the academic "security school" particularly the Copenhagen School of security studies, the combination of WMDs, terrorism, and rogue-state behavior formed the central security logic behind the war<sup>(9)</sup>.

In this perspective, Saddam Hussein's regime could not be allowed to reconstruct WMD capabilities while also maintaining links to terrorist groups, as this created long-term risks to both U.S. and international security, as emphasized in the 2002 National Security Strategy and related policy documents issued by the U.S. presidency in the lead-up to the invasion<sup>(10)</sup>.





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the justification of terror was confirmed and repeat declaration from U.S leaders that Iraq could provide a suitable environment for the terrorism groups even in the absence of direct operation links with al-Qaeda. In his 2002 state of union address, George W. Bush argue that states accused of supporting terrorism could not be distinguished from terrorist organizations themselves, warning that the threat emerged from the combination of radical groups and hostile regimes. This idea effectively led to the lack of need for the evidence required to justify military action by emphasizing potential risks rather than assured cooperation and ongoing security threats from the iraqi side in post September 11 period<sup>(11)</sup>.

the investigations after the war, cast serious doubt on the strength of the terrorism justification. The U.S senate select committee on intelligence concluded in its 2006 report that there was no strong evidence of a cooperation between Saddam Hussein regime and al-Qaeda. while limited contact and indirect interaction were acknowledged, that report focus that this did not amount to an operational alliance or coordinated terrorist planning. This finding highlighted a significant gap between pre-war political rhetoric and post-war empirical assessments of Iraq actual involvement in transnational terrorism<sup>(12)</sup>.

Some academic analyses later indicated that terrorism served as a rhetorical strengthening of the threat of WMD rather than an independent strategic motive for intervention. By linking Iraq to the war on terror US foreign policy decision makers justified the invasion within post 9/11 moral and security narrative which led to the neglect of alternative policy options such as containment and detrence. This process was described in security studies as the adoption of security measure by portraying Iraq as an existential threat despite the absence of concrete evidence of terrorist coordination<sup>(13)</sup>.

### 1.3 Spreading democracy

Spreading democracy and democratic transition was one of the important justification that U.S administration depend on it to justify the invasion. this invasion was portrayed as a moral mission seeking to change the dictatorial regime and spread the democracy in the Iraq and the region. In the one of the formal speech of the George W. Bush on February 26, 2002, he stated that " a liberated Iraq is capable of demonstrating the power of freedom in that vital region" and he presentiaon that the ending of Saddam Hussein regime would give Iraqis" opportunity to build a stable and democratic society"<sup>(14)</sup>.

This importance of democracy was reinforced in speeches delivered by the U.S president later, specially in early 200. For exmap, in his state of the

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union address on March 19, 2003. he described framed the invasion as an effort "to disarm Iraq, liberate its people, and protect the world from a grave danger" linking regime change and with political freedom. He emphasized that removing Saddam Hussein was a necessary step to enable Iraqis to determine their political future, asserting that democratic transition was a strategic objective and a moral responsibility of the United States strategy in 2003<sup>(15)</sup>.

These statements were of fundamental importance to the United States strategy toward Iraq, 2002 National Security Strategy mentions as generally, indicating that the United States would use influence and its power to ensure political freedom and democratic institutions, free market as the basis for international peace and security<sup>(16)</sup>.

The discourse of democracy transition was also based at its core on the broader post-cold war liberal discourse, which posits that democratic governance is a key factor for long-term international stability. United States leaders and the political scholar argued that the dictatorial regime in the Middle East led to the insecurity by promoting repression, extremism, and regional instability, while democratic transition would address the root causes of conflict in the region. This assumption reflects the influence of international liberal thought, which links this type of regime change to foreign policy behavior. It suggests that democratic states are less likely to engage in aggression or support transnational violence<sup>(17)</sup>.

The democratic transition in Iraq has been characterized by significant conceptual and practical ambiguity. While United States leaders have emphasized election and constitutional reform as indicators of democratic progress, they have not given due importance to the social, institutional, and historical conditions necessary for achieving a sustainable democracy. Comparative studies indicate that post-dictatorship transitions, especially externally imposed change, particularly under military occupation, often lead to difficulty in achieving stability and legitimacy. In this context, Iraq represents a highly complex model, as it attempted to pursue democracy simultaneously with state-building and combating terrorism and insurgency making it difficult to achieve the declared moral aims of the United States invasion<sup>(18)</sup>.

In an interview with a political party official member, he emphasized that the United States needed a set of narratives to bolster international public opinion support of the invasion of Iraq. The United States adopted rhetoric such as the war on terror, the danger of Iraq possessing WMD and the promotion of democracy to justify military intervention as a necessary and legitimate act. From his perspective these justifications t



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the time were fundamentally logical and capable of convincing the international community and facilitating the formation of a broad international coalition to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime<sup>(19)</sup>.

At the end the United States depended on three primary justification to justify the intervention of Iraq such as destroying the weapons of mass destruction, War on terror. and spreading democracy many studies after the war mention that this official justification was not fully reflect strategic motives for the invasion.

### **2.The ambiguity of the aims and motives behind the invasion of Iraq 2003 and its rationality**

In this section, we will focus to highlighting the contradictions between the stated reason for the war and the less obvious or underlying objectives that had the greatest impact on United States decision- making. Instead of viewing regime change as the basis aims, we delve into how ambiguity in strategy goals influenced the course of the invasion and the subsequent consequences. Furthermore this section assesses the rationality of the war by examining United States strategy were compatible with political. security situation and social in Iraq at that time. By combining academic discourse with critical evaluations, this section emphasized how unstated objectives and miscalculations contributed to the long – term instability in Iraq.

#### **2.1 Unclear objectives and ambiguity of U.S invasion of Iraq**

Where the United States strategic aims behind the invasion in Iraq were wide-ranging and often characterized by lack of clarity, as they saw the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime as a clear and achievable goal, while many analysts saw that the United States invaded Iraq without a specific plan for what would happen next. Michael O'Hanlon, a prominent researcher specializing in U.S defence and security policy in Brookings institute, says that the war game was based on a shifting foundation, he pointed that the Washington did not have a clear strategic for the war after removal of the Saddam Hussein regime on the ground<sup>(20)</sup>. James H. Lebovic a researcher of United States a security and foreign policy, argued that the period of post – invasion marked by "strategic confusion" solid framework for occupational, Iraq's institutional and manage the social and economic and humanitarian consequences of sudden regime transition<sup>(21)</sup>.

One of the most important interpretations in academic literature is that regime change was the primary motivation, even if not explicitly stated by U.S side, for the United States intervention in Iraq. The U.S strategy was not limited to changing Saddam Hussein regime but also to dismantling the Baathist power structure in the state and replacing it with a new system.

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However this ambition was not supported by a detailed or realistic plan for reconstruction and political reconciliation, Paul Bremer head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, admitted that the United States entered Iraq without a comprehensive strategy for managing the state after imagining the system, stating that there was no master plan for the reconstruction of Iraq<sup>(22)</sup>.

Among other objectives, scholars argue that the United States decided to maintain its credibility, especially after the event of 11/9 many US leaders in decision – making center emphasized the need to demonstrate US capability firmly and proactively, even in the absence of broad international support. Buzan and Hansen argue that U.S actions of 11/9 reflected a desire to strengthen its unilateral power and to ensure that the resolve and strength of the United States were not to be questioned by hostile and unstable governments<sup>(23)</sup>.

A number of scholars argued that these fears were more influential than the claim of direct Iraqi threat. The authors argue that the invasion can be understood as an attempt to restore generalized deterrence that the U.S sought to reassert its global dominance and power to deter any future challenge to its authority<sup>(24)</sup>. From this perspective the war was not so much about responding to an immediate threat but about shaping the international environment in ways that would protect long-term United States interests. An approach that ultimately imposed heavy costs on Iraqi society<sup>(25)</sup>.

As later explained in the academic literature, securing long-term influence in the Gulf region, particularly through energy and geopolitics in the Middle East, and despite the focus on this aspect in official discourse, is significantly reflected in the U.S strategy where it is indicated that control over the energy infrastructure and energy sources in the Gulf is seen in Washington as essential for global stability and the expansion of U.S influence<sup>(26)</sup>.

### 2.2 the ideological motivation behind the intervention

To gain a deeper understanding of U.S strategy during this period, it is important to examine the ideology that shaped the 2003 invasion. Dobbins and his allies explain that the George W. Bush administration was heavily influenced by the belief that the United States had a responsibility to preemptively use of power to reshape the global security environment, particularly after the 11/9 attack<sup>(27)</sup>. This idea was closely linked to neoconservative thought, which emphasized U.S exceptionalism and the moral obligation to spread and promote democracy and use military force to remove hostile regimes<sup>(28)</sup>.





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Many of the top decision-makers and advisor of the George W. Bush administration had close ties to neoconservative institutions, such as the vice president Dick Cheney, and secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld. The Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a Washington based organization founded in 1997, was one of the most influential neoconservative organizations, with its members holding key positions in the Bush administration. PNAC consistently argued that Saddam Hussein's regime posed a long-term threat to U.S. interests and that regime change in Iraq was necessary even before 9/11. In a 1998 open letter to President Clinton, the organization explicitly advocated for the "removal of Saddam Hussein's regime by force" as a primary means of securing U.S. strategic interests and reshaping the balance of power in the Middle East<sup>(29)</sup>.

Neoconservatives though viewed U.S. power as an effective tool for reshaping the international order. Consequently, U.S. military superiority and political leadership were seen as instruments for transforming strategically important regions by changing hostile regimes and promoting political systems aligned with U.S. interests. The neoconservative ideology depends on three main points: the moral imperative to remove dictatorial regimes, emphasis on liberal democratic values, and the reliance on the use of United States military force to reshape international order<sup>(30)</sup>.

The view of Neoconservatives interacted strongly with the post 9/11 environment, leading to more assertive U.S. foreign policy especially after the attack. George W. Bush's administration adopted a hardline approach to potential threats and emphasized the use of force against emerging threats. This thinking was reflected in official discourse. In his 2002 West Point speech, President George W. Bush stated that "United States has a responsibility to promote freedom, because free nations do not threaten their neighbors"<sup>(31)</sup>.

Robert Kagan, a leader of the thinkers of neoconservatism and a proponent (PNAC) who served as an informal advisor to leaders in George W. Bush's administration, wrote that the United States should strive to reshape the world in favor of democratic values through active engagement and the use of force when necessary<sup>(32)</sup>. Zalmay Khalilzad, who served as ambassador to Afghanistan and then Iraq in the George W. Bush administration, argued that the re-establishment of a democratic Iraq would change the strategic balance in the Middle East and reduce the control and influence of hostile states on U.S.<sup>(33)</sup>.

### 2.3 Rationality of Invasion

Given the events that transpired, judging whether the motives behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq were "rational" requires a profound and meticulous

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examination. In this context, rationality does not simply mean choosing the right decisions or relying on intelligence information, but also extends to the suitability of the chosen policies to the stated objective and their compatibility with what was known about the political, social, and security realities of Iraq at that time<sup>(34)</sup>. Scholars in security studies particularly the Copenhagen School, argue that the Bush administration genuinely viewed Iraq as an immediate threat due to consequences of its possession of WMD and its connection to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. From this perspective, the invasion followed a preemptive security logic rooted in the fear and uncertainty that dominated U.S. decision-makers after the event of 11/9<sup>(35)</sup>. The Iraqi Survey Group noted that the U.S. leadership was operating in an atmosphere of "extraordinary danger, fear, and weakness" following the attack of 11/9 which significantly influenced how potential future threats were interpreted<sup>(36)</sup>.

In the same vein, the point indicates a serious discrepancy between official claims and the reality on the ground. These claims lost credibility due to intelligence failures about the weapons of mass destruction, which was the primary justification for the invasion of Iraq. Subsequent investigations revealed that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program had been destroyed in 1991, and Saddam Hussein had ended its remaining activities in 1996<sup>(37)</sup>. This finding further weakened the arguments that Iraq posed an immediate threat. Later in his 2016 testimony British Prime Minister Tony Blair acknowledged these failures stating, "I take full responsibility for any mistake without exception", admitting that "the intelligence I received was wrong, and the consequences have proven to be more long-lasting and hostile than anticipated"<sup>(38)</sup>.

Later, criticism broadened to encompass the consequences of invasion. Boris Johnson indicated that the war had produced more disastrous results than anticipated. He argued that British and U.S. forces "had absolutely no plan" for governing Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, describing the invasion as a failure and a grave mistake. He added that the dismantling of Iraq's institutions "unleashed chaos" leading to the growth of militia and terrorist groups including ISIS<sup>(39)</sup>.

The lack of a coherent post-conflict strategy, aligning U.S. actions with their stated objectives, further complicated matters. While the invasion succeeded in the removing of Saddam Hussein's regime but it failed to establish a stable political system. As Dodge mentions that the early decisions, such as the dismantling of state institutions, created "a big vacuum that Coalition Provisional Authority was unable to fill"<sup>(40)</sup>. The issue of legitimacy further complicated the invasion, for his part the UN



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Secretary- General Kofi Anan publicly stated that” from our perspective and from the prespective of the Charter, it was illegal” referring to the invasion of Iraq<sup>(41)</sup>.

This ideologically driven decision-making process supports the argument that post 9/11 attack U.S foreign policy has deviated from rationality, interests-based thinking in favor of ideological assumptions and overconfidence<sup>(42)</sup>.

According to an interview with high iraqi military official, the weaknesses in U.S stratigic planning were very clear before the invasion. He referred to a series of meetings held in Washington before 2003, where the the primary focus fo discussions was how easy it would be to remove iraqi regime due the weakness of iraq army anf the prevailing economic situation. He stated that when i asked how iraq would be governed ad adminstered afret regime change, no one answerd or prepare to explain<sup>(43)</sup>.

This section revealts that the 2003 invasion of iraq was not based on clear, coherent aims, both rather on a mix of unreliable intelligence reports. While the invasion was publicly promoted as a rational response to security threats, the reality is taht pos-invasion planning was absent and incompatible whith the political and social realities of Iraq. The gap between the stated objectives and the practical rationality of decision widened. Thisin turn ultimately resulted in o form of strategic decision-making shaped more by ideological convections than by realism, leading to the continued instability in Iraq.

### 3. Lack of U.S Strategy Feasible After Invasion 2003

After the 2003 invasion, it became clear that here were fundemental flaws in the U.S strategy for managing and rebuilding Iraq after the invasion. Although fastly destroyed the iraqi regime, the united states entered the post-war period without a clear or realistic strategy for addressing the security, political, social, and economic issues in Iraq. Furthermore the decisions of key post-invasion policies, such as Dissolution of iraqi military and de-Baathification, contributed to further instability.

#### 3.1 The abcnce of Strategic Planning of the U.S to Rebuild State Institutions after 2003

One of the most imporatatn decision after the invasion was the establishment of a governing authorityto replace the Ba’athist regime, in july 2003, the Coalition Provosional Authority (CPA) was established under the leadership of paul Brammer, along with Iraqi Governing Cuncil (IGC) as a political body tasked with providing assistance to the CPA, the IGC represented the main political factors in Iraq<sup>(44)</sup>. In an interview with a official party member he mention that the decition by CPA was

acceptable in that time and supported by the kurds and shia groups espically becuase whta the suffer by Saddam Hussien regime, but the latter that decision effect it was disastrous because founadtion political system it depend on sectarian representation more than national representation<sup>(45)</sup>.

the stated aims of foudition an inclusive polotocal body, the Iraqi Governin council was to ceate a temporary representative, body that would reflect iraq's |Components of the Iraqi people, the method of its formation led to long- standing problems. The Council chamber was allocated accroding the ethnic sectarian division: 13 seats of shia arabs, 5 seats of sunni arabs, 5 seats of kurds, 1 seat of turkman, 1 seat christian. This system later became" sectarian quotas". While the stated purpose of this authority was to ensure comprehensive representaion for all segment of Iraqi socity, in reality, it entrenched identity polotics at highest levels of government<sup>(46)</sup>.

By formally structuring political representation along sectarian and ethinc lines, (CPA) invdvertently excerbated this divisions that had alerady taken root after regime removal. Contary to its stated aim of the new political structure was based on sectarian identity, as evidenced by CPA documents<sup>(47)</sup>. Haddad is a researchers specializing in iraqi and sectarian affairs, argue that this program" depended sectarian consciouness" and became the foundation of policy in subsequent years<sup>(48)</sup>.

Since this approach to government formation continued after 2005, official negotiations for government formation were conducted primarily on a sectarian and ethnic basis. power and institutional positions were distributed depended. In the absence of a clear national vision, sectarian identity became the bais reference point for political life in Iraq after the change of regime<sup>(49)</sup>. Spicially the order NO.1 and the order NO.2 that CPA dicsion to desultion iraqi army and the de\_bathefication was had b big effect on the political life after that<sup>(50)</sup>.

### 3.2 The Effect of De-Bathefication on Stability in Iraq

The desicion of CPA particulary the de-Bathefication, were fundamental to the policies it implemented after the invasion, an iraqi parlemant member argued that, intially, a necessary step was needed to ensure the Bathist regime non-return, the widespread and indiscriminate application of this policy, without distanguishing between top member of regime and the public people trasformed into a tool for political excusion and sectarian revenge. He argued that de-Bathefication was applied blindly. And in became a political weapon more than mechanism for justice<sup>(51)</sup>.

The CPA order No:1 aimed to exclude large segment of the population from public service by dismissing bathist party member from state





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institutions and barring them from holding any future public sector positions<sup>(52)</sup>. This order was widely implemented in ministries, public administration, and even universities and hospitals, regardless of whether they were involved in the crimes of the Baathist regime. U.S officials member in administration as Colin Powell later acknowledged the damage caused by the decision he says” this policy was very broad, and I mean army people whose continued employment in government departments was essential<sup>(53)</sup>. Allawi who served as Minister of defence and finance in Iraq described the de-Baathification policy as having” emptied the state of its substance and deprived Iraq of experienced administrators at a important period”<sup>(54)</sup>.

The dismissal of thousands of professionals as skilled workers resulted in a severe institutional vacuum at the time when Iraq desperately needed experienced administrators, particularly in the post-regime era. According to U.S and Iraq estimates the de-Baathification policy and the dissolution of Iraqi army together resulted in the dismissal of approximately 400,000 to 500,000 public sector employees<sup>(55)</sup>. Hospitals, schools, ministries and infrastructure lost essential expertise, weakening the state ability to provide basic services to its citizens<sup>(56)</sup>. Instead of strengthening governance, the de-Baathification process weakened the state and exacerbated public discontent<sup>(57)</sup>.

In addition to the significant social consequences, many Iraqis, particularly Sunni Arabs, viewed de-Baathification as collective punishment. This perception exacerbated sectarian tensions and fueled armed resistance. The International Crisis Group further stated that this policy ‘ fueled Sunni alienation and strengthened armed resistance directly linking escalation of violence in Iraq’<sup>(58)</sup>.

In an interview with a high Iraqi military official confirmed that the de-Baathification policy was initially justified but was later used as a tool against opponents. He reiterated that 500,000 Iraqi employees were left unemployed a situation later exploited by terrorist groups, many of those dismissed by government positions joined these groups due to the dire economic conditions and financial incentives. He asserted that the Accountability and Justice Commission in Iraq used this policy to exclude their opponents from the democratic process, for example in 2010 more than 50 parliamentary candidates were disqualified through de-Baathification. He emphasized that while the core of the policy was initially acceptable, its implementation later deviated from the path of justice and became an unjust policy within Iraqi institutions<sup>(59)</sup>.

### 3.3 Security Vacuum as a Result of Dissolution of the Iraqi Military

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The dissolution of Iraqi Army under Order No 2 issued by the CPA on 23 May 2003, was one of the most damaging decisions to the Iraqi security situation. This order officially dissolved the ministry of Defence, the Iraqi army, the Ir Force, and other security institutions, which in turn led to the termination of service for all personnel associated with these bodies<sup>(60)</sup>. As a direct result of the decision, a thousands of military member were left without job, without salaries, pensions or alternative employment opportunities. This created a large segment of trained and armed individuals who were excluded from civilian life after 2003<sup>(61)</sup>.

In an interview with high peshmerga official, the dissolution of Iraqi army was logical in principle, given its close ties to the Ba'athist regime and ideology. However he asserts that the method of implementation was flawed, as the hundreds of thousands of soldiers were dismissed and sent home without salaries, pensions, or even alternative employment opportunities, creating an ideal environment for their recruitment by terrorist groups<sup>(62)</sup>.

The decision had immediate and severe consequences. The sudden security vacuum allowed looting and crime to flourish in Iraq cities<sup>(63)</sup>. General Ricardo Senes wrote that disbanding the army "created chaos overnight" leaving U.S forces unable to maintain security. Many unemployed former Iraqi army soldiers joined insurgent movement, contributing significantly to the growth of terrorist groups in Iraq, such as al-Qaeda<sup>(64)</sup>.

Furthermore, according to high Iraqi military official he confirmed that while decision of dissolve the army was initially acceptable, it ultimately led to disastrous results. This was particularly true given that entire army was sent home without any plan, especially those who had not played an active role in the Ba'athist regime. In Mosul alone, approximately 50,000 officers were discharged. In the future, terrorist groups exploited their vulnerable economic circumstances and recruited them. The security vacuum created by the disbandment of the Iraqi army further exacerbated the security situation and led to an escalation of violence and terrorism<sup>(65)</sup>. A number of official documents issued after the war confirm that regional powers exploited the security vacuum in Iraq to expand their influence there by supporting militias within Iraq. Particularly Iran<sup>(66)</sup>. In addition to the significant incursion of the Turkish army into Kurdistan Region of Iraq<sup>(67)</sup>. The reason of the absence of Iraqi army, Iraq was transformed into an open arena for regional powers<sup>(68)</sup>.

The restructuring of Iraqi political system along sectarian and ethnic lines, coupled with the dissolution of the Iraqi army and the de-Baathification process, aimed to eradicate all vestiges of former Baathist regime. U.S subsequently attempted to rebuild the administrative and



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military structure, but faced significant challenges and Iraq remained unstable for many years as a result of these decisions.

The failure of U.S strategy after 2003 was not sloely due to its objectives. More importantly, tha practical mechanisms for implementation were unsuitable, leading to societal fragmentation and state of perpetual in security. Ultimately, these policies taken together, demonstrated that they were hasty decision that resulted in long-term poletical, security, and social instability in Iraq.

### 4. U.S Strategy of Withdrawl from Iraq (2009-2011)

The period between the 2003-2011 marked a significant shift in U.S strategy toward Iraq. The U.S strategy transfermed from direct intervasion for regimne change and subsequent occupation to a complete withdrawl. This shift was the culmination of years of continuous violence subsental human and material costs, and a growing awareness among U.s of the limits of its ability to exert influence on the ground. While the United States declared that the withdrawl was due legal responsibility and respect of iraqi sovereignty there were other reason that led to this withdrawl and the consequences of the withdrawl. This period is very important for find the causes the changing from direct intervasion to withdrawl and how the strategy influenced the fluctions in U.S strategy toward Iraq from 2003-2011.

#### 4.1 U.S Formal Justification For Withdrawal from Iraq 2011

United states officially justified its withdrawal as a strategic transition due to improved security condition, the rebuilding of Iraqi institutions, and respect of Iraqi sovereignty, particularly after the decrease in violence following the 2007 troop surge. U.S officials emphasized that the primary objectives of the intervation had been achieved by U.S force. Presdent George W. Bush played a key role is supporting this narrative in 2008, presdent Bush declared that” the situation in Iraq has passed the critical stage” attributing the improved security to the troop surge strategy and cooperation between U.S forces and Iraqi forces. In the president’s view, the decline in violence and political progress strongly indicated that Iraq was going to stability and the stabilizing of democracy, this rending a continued large-scale U.S military presence unnecessary<sup>(69)</sup>.

The U.S troops surge strategy was used and widely cited as evidence of the success of the United States withdrawl strategy from Iraq. The U.S leadership argued that deploying additional trrops had significantly weakened violence and terrorism, particularly sectarian fighting, and that the decrease in this violence had consequently opened up space for dialogue between the political factors and Iraqi leadership. Based on this,



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U.S policymakers claimed that it was now possible to gradually transfer power to the relevant institution in Iraq, relying on the idea that the withdrawal was a logical consequence of the success of the U.S strategy, not a failure<sup>(70)</sup>.

The principles of sovereignty was the second justify of the Official U.S narrative of withdrawal. U.S policy-makers consistently asserted that Iraq was largely capable of governing itself and securing its own security. This argument was reinforced by the states of Forces agreement (SOFA) signed in November 2008, which stipulated a withdrawal from Iraqi sites by June 2009 and complete withdrawal 2011. President George W. Bush emphasized SOFA as the strongest evidence of respect for Iraqi sovereignty<sup>(71)</sup>.

Also this calm was reinforced after President Barack Obama assumed the presidency of U.S. in announcing the end of United States operations in Iraq. Obama stated that” the Iraqi people now bear the responsibility for their country’s security”. This emphasized the shift from combat to strategy of partnership, training, and support for Iraq<sup>(72)</sup>. With the withdrawal considered a fulfillment fo the U.S commitments to finish the war. Official data highlighted the increase in Iraq security forces which exceeded 600,000 by 2010, demonstrating that Iraq was large enough to maintain its internal security<sup>(73)</sup>.

Military assessments were heavily relied upon to support these claims. In his testimony in the Congress, General Devid Petareus stated that the security situation had improved and that levels of violence had fallen to their lowest range since 2004<sup>(74)</sup>. The security assessments confirming the decrease in violence in iraq, were used to justify the easing of tensions and to begin the withdrawal of U.S forces from Iraq<sup>(75)</sup>.

Domestic political consideration in the U.S played a role in reinforcing this discourse during 2007-2008, as a public support fo the war in Iraq decline sharply and pressure mounted to bring troop to home, particularly during 2008 presedental campaign. Ending the was a primary key of the campaign, with withdrawal seen as a necessary step due to public opinion and significant finance and human costs of long conflict<sup>(76)</sup>.

United States, taking these official justifications together, presented this withdrawal as a wise, honorable, and succesful end to the Iraq war, citing improved security, the reinforce of democracy in Iraq, and legal obligations, under the SOFA Agreement and respect of Iraqi sovereignty.

### 4.2 The Ambiguity of Motives Behind the U.S Withdrawal from Iraq

While official narratives relied on the principles of partnership, responsible strategy, and sovereignty of Iraq, many of Scholars argued that the U.S had decepitve motives that shaped the decision of





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withdrawal. This motives are rarely addressed in public discourse but emerge clearly through academic analyses and studies, casting doubt on the official U.S narratives of the withdrawal.

According an interview with high political party member, he highlighting that the U.S withdrawal was not motivated by strategic pressure or legal considerations as justified, but also by the large losses suffered by the United States in Iraq, in addition to the decline in popular support as he says” the increasing U.S losses in terms of material and human life led to increased political fatigue within the United States, and pressures were exerted on Washington to withdraw, while the political and security situation in Iraq was not ready for this withdrawal”<sup>(77)</sup>.

The financial costs of the war was enormous due to its duration. In 2008 U.S spent alot of moony on this war, accroding to the Congressional Budget Office, war costs exceeded 600 \$ billion by the end of 2008<sup>(78)</sup>. The economists Stiglitz & bilmes bilive thats if all epenses, such as veterans care, compensation payments, and war related cost, are include the total cost of Iraq war will be over than \$2 trillion. And the United States entry the into the 2008 global financial crisis placed significant pressure on the economy due to the war costs, incrazed deficits, and economic presuure it came a one of the key factor of the withdrawal drom iraq<sup>(79)</sup>.

Another importnat motives, not addressed in Official justifications, is the gradual realization by the United States leadership that rebuilding the Iraqi state and institutions is more complicated matter than initially anticipated<sup>(80)</sup>. The collapse of security, particularly the rapid escalation of sectariansim and the weakening of security and political institutions,undermined the U.S ability to reshape Iraqi state<sup>(81)</sup>. According to Nora Bensahel U.S policymakers came to understand the limitations of United States ability to influence other contry and devolved Iraq<sup>(82)</sup>. This realization among U.S strategy leadership was a major factor in the decreased enthusiasm for engaging in a long-term war. Making a withdrawal appear as a way to minimize further dmage<sup>(83)</sup>.

Official documents issued by the Department of Defence confirm that regional geopolitic played a significant role in the withdrwal, while the success of removal Saddam huissen contributed to incrazing Iranian influence in Iraq, especally given the close ties between Iran and Iraqi political paties and armed groups<sup>(84)</sup>, U.S policymakers concluded that prolonged U.S preesence in Iraq would directly lead to a confrontation were U.S strategy in that time sought to avoid. Therefore, the withdrawal was a means of mitigating the risk of further escalation in the regional situation<sup>(85)</sup>.

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The U.S withdrawal from Iraq in primary was based on the military assessments in 2008, as U.S leadership consistently emphasized that a swift withdraw was necessary, as the situation of Iraq lacked a purely military situation<sup>(86)</sup>. As a Anthony Cordesman he argued that violence in Iraq could not be ended fundamentally without political reforms. further more this viewpoint was based on the premise that withdrawal was a strategic realist not because weakness of U.S. the United States military leaderships understood that their presence in Iraq would not be stabilizing factor but would instead worsen the situation if the political progress was not development<sup>(87)</sup>.

According to an interview with high Iraqi military official and a member of the Iraqi parliament, the Iraqi side represented by Shiia also exerted significant pressure on the U.S to withdrawal due to Iranian pressure on pro-Iranian political factions in Iraq<sup>(88)</sup>. Iraqi high military official stated that in 2008 the Iraqi army signed a training and logistical equipment agreement with the Pentagon extending to 2020, it was understood that the Iraqi army would not be ready by 2020, but internal pressure played major role to stop any agreement with us military after withdrawal especially who was in government and present Shiia. In one of my meeting with the ambassador at the U.S embassy in Baghdad in 2009 in my position as a Chief of Staff of the Iraqi army, a group of security leaders including Faleh al-Fayyad who was the National Security Advisor were present the U.S military leaders at the time proposed forming 4 military divisions, as the marines modeled, which have been a qualitative leap for the Iraqi army. however, Faleh al-Fayyad asked how long this could take ? and they answer Four years. He concluded the U.S troops will not stay here for another four years" what I am trying to conclude is that the Iraqi government, which was under Iranian influence, was pressuring the U.S policymakers to withdrawal<sup>(89)</sup>.

Those deep motives, combined with others, suggest that the decision to withdrawal from Iraq is shaped by a combination factors, not just one. These factors included economic, political, regional, strategic borders. While these elements were often absent from the public discourse, they were the primary drivers in determining and directing the United States withdrawal strategy from Iraq<sup>(90)</sup>.

### 4.3 The Effect of the Withdrawal Decision on Iraq

According to a high Iraqi military official, the withdrawal from Iraq was neither timely and not realistic and had a significant effect. Iraqi forces were not completely ready to maintain security on the ground especially on the border. Many Iraqi commanders indicated that a withdrawal without continued external support would lead to security crisis in Iraq. In





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the meeting with Iraqi leadership before the withdrawal, president Masoud Barzani asked the Iraqi leadership who support the withdrawal especially the minister of defense and interior that Iraqi forces ready to receiving the security file they answered no<sup>(91)</sup>.

Even after the withdrawal, one of the most important challenges was the continued growth of militias in Iraq. Although the overall level of violence in Iraq decreased in Iraq 2007, large groups such as the Mahdi Army, Asaib Ahl-haq and the Badr organization had a massive armed structure. The number of militia in Iraq in 2011 arrived more than 100,000 fighters, most of them operated outside of the state<sup>(92)</sup>.

The terrorism remained a significant threat in Iraq during the withdrawal, for example al-Qaeda continuing to carry a bombings and assassinations aimed the civilian and Iraq security forces and the state institutions<sup>(93)</sup>. The United Nations report mention that Iraq experienced an average 400 to 500 accident per month in 2001. While the security situation had improved stability but the root causes of that violence was not resolve it<sup>(94)</sup>.

The weakness of institutions in has undermined the Iraqi government. In 2011 Iraq ranked the place 175<sup>th</sup> of 182 country on transparency international's corruption perception Index. Basic services in Iraq, such as electricity, education, social welfare, and healthcare were severely lacking due to the control of these ministries be sectarian parties. Resources in Iraq were distributed based on political loyalty rather than national allegiance<sup>(95)</sup>.

One of the most significant consequences of the U.S withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 was the increase and intensification of regional interference in Iraq. Particularly coinciding with the withdrawal. Iran supported Shia militias to become a major player in the Iraqi political process, and Iran become the most influential actor in Iraq<sup>(96)</sup>. According to interview with a Iraqi parliament member he asserted that the withdrawal was the primary reason of regional interference, especially the weakening of the Iraqi Military establishment, an U.S withdrawal was not rationality creating a political and security vacuum in Iraq that was exploited by regional<sup>(97)</sup>.

Also Turkey has strengthened its position through military and economic involvement especially in Kurdistan region of Iraq, through its operations, against the PKK. This operation has highlighted the weakness of the Iraqi military and political system. Has foreign power has gained control over border areas. Turkish military forces have had a very little coordination with central government in Baghdad, which has significantly impacted governance in Iraq, especially in border regions Turkey has also entered

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Iraq through economic project, further expanding its influence and reinforcing the perception of foreign interference in Iraq political and security processes after the withdrawal<sup>(98)</sup>.

Even within U.S institutions, internal assessments pointed to fear about the effects of withdrawal. General James Mattis stated that Iraqi forces primarily dependent on U.S intelligence, logistical support, and air support<sup>(99)</sup>. The CIA warned that the armed groups would quickly regroup in the withdrawal occurred before Iraqi forces were fully established<sup>(100)</sup>.

According to the high-ranking official he indicated that the ill-conceived withdrawal of U.S forces had significant long-term repercussions, especially as the region was suffering from Arab Spring, the collapse of the security apparatus in Syria, and terrorist activity in Syria, while the Iraqi border was not secure. The movement of terrorists between Iraq and Syria became dangerous upon the withdrawal, which was a direct cause of the subsequent movement of terrorism from Syria to Iraq<sup>(101)</sup>.

After the withdrawal, it was described as being based on rational calculations that assessed military, security, and economic factors, however upon deeper search we see that there were other reasons related to regional pressure, in addition to internal Iraqi factors as well as the exorbitant costs of the war in terms of both finance and human costs. Here we find a big gap between the official justifications and the vague, unaddressed justifications which played a decisive role in the decision to withdraw from Iraq.

### Conclusion

In this article as analysis the U.S strategy toward Iraq between 2003-2011 that this strategy followed a path marked by profound fluctuations, ambiguity, and dire consequences. The intervention began in the guise of combating weapons of WMD and Terrorism and promoting democracy, but in reality it devolved into a protracted conflict. This included the failure to rebuild fragile institutions and the attempt to contain the repercussions of decision made by the U.S while the U.S succeeded in removing Saddam Hussein regime, the subsequent phase demonstrated the limitations of U.S strategy in creating a stable political and social environment, and it back to the reason of lack of long term planning

This article argued that the primary problem of U.S strategy was the big gap between the stated aims of the invasion and the reality on the ground in Iraq. And the decision made by the CPA such as dissolving the Iraqi army, de-Baathification, and dividing the political system on sectarian bases, led to weakened the Iraqi state and exacerbated divisions



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in Iraqi society. And led to contributed to instability in the after period . the order of can not build a stable democratic state, these policies led to contradictions within the intervention itself, highlighting the frivolity of regime change without a clear plan for the after war to achieving stability and rebuild the state on the democratic principles .

Furthermore, the justifications that United States presented for the withdarwal in period of 2009-2011, contradicted the unstated reasons that played a key role in achiving that withdrawal. The withdrawal was not merely a U.S strategy; internal factors in Iraq, the unstated motives, also played a fundamental role in the decision.

And finally this period show it that the U.S strategy find a lot of challenges in the iraq, as a normal result of foreign occupation withou any clear strategy for the later period after removal Saddam Hussien, for the understood the U.S strategy toward Iraq this period was the bases phase to understanding the fluctuations of U.S strategy after the 2011.

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