



# WHY AMERICA INVADED IRAQ

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Why did the United States go to war against Iraq in 2003? The decision was controversial at the time and remains so today. But the reason was clear: Saddam Hussein, the brutal dictator of Iraq for 35 years was the central threat to peace in the Middle East.

With that threat removed, the Bush Administration believed the establishment of a functioning democracy in Iraq would encourage the growth of democracy elsewhere in the Arab world. As democracy spread, terrorism would retreat.

But it is on the blood-stained life and career of Saddam Hussein that we need to concentrate in order better to understand why the United States felt forced to act in 2003.

We begin with the Iran-Iraq War, which Saddam started in 1980 and which lasted until 1988. One million people died in the course of the decade-long struggle. And during that war, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) – especially poison gas – were used on a regular basis by both sides.

Once his war with Iran ended, instead of building up his shattered nation, Saddam decided to embark on another lunatic adventure: In 1990, he tried to grab 19% of the world's oil supply by invading Kuwait.

His brief annexation of Kuwait proved to be another disaster. The Mother of All Battles, as Saddam called it, turned out to be a 3-week rout, his Iraqi army utterly defeated by a US-led coalition. But rather than trying Saddam as a war criminal, America and the West allowed him to stay in power.

This appeasement eventually led Saddam, once again, to draw entirely the wrong conclusion and to his making yet another colossal mistake. He arrogantly believed that his Iraqi army might actually defeat the United States in a second encounter.

His trump card, he believed, or at least attempted to make the world believe, was his possession of WMD - large quantities of poison gas and, if only in his imagination, a rapidly progressing nuclear weapons development program. There was no reason to doubt that he had WMD, as he had used poison gas in his war against Iran. No one – not the Germans, not the Russians, not the British – had any doubts about this.

Looking back, at the twelve years between the Gulf War and the Iraq War, Saddam might have been able to re-establish international credibility by complying with the 16 reasonable UN resolutions passed between November 1990 and December 1999. These resolutions simply

required Saddam to, among other things: 'destroy all of his ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers; stop support for terrorism internationally and prevent terrorist organizations from operating within Iraq; and bear financial liability for damage from the Gulf War'.

But Saddam spent the 1990s defying and mocking America and Britain in every possible way. He attempted to shoot down Royal Air Force and US Air Force planes over the no-fly zones created to prevent him from mass-slaughtering his own citizens; he corruptly profited from the UN oil-for-food scandal while Iraqi children starved to death; he offered \$25,000 to the families of every Palestinian suicide-bomber; he harbored many of the world's leading terrorists, and he expelled UN weapon's inspectors.

By the time of the terrorist attack on the United States of 9/11/ -- something for which Saddam was not responsible nor ever blamed for -- any War against Terror that did not involve toppling this brutal dictator, who might supply WMD to terrorists for future attacks, would have been absurd.

Still, had he backed down and accepted repeated United Nations resolutions - especially those requiring him to prove he had destroyed his stockpiles of WMD and had no nuclear weapons development program, there would have been no U.S. action. Instead, he only became more bellicose.

That's why some leading Democrats -- such as Senators Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden and John Kerry -- voted to authorize the second Iraq War. Only later did they recant their decisions after claiming that they had been lied to by the Administration. But there had been no need for the Bush Administration to lie. Its assessment of the threat Saddam posed concurred with that of the Clinton administration, as well as with numerous European intelligence services. And the road to a democratic Middle East had to begin in Iraq. A vicious, mass-murdering, despot who had convinced the world that he had WMD and would use them, stood in the way.

In the spring of 2003, that was obvious both to Republicans and many Democrats as well as to the leadership of Britain and dozens of other nations. That's why President Bush took America to war against Iraq.

I'm Andrew Roberts for Prager University.