

## **The economic background of the American decision to change the political system in Iraq on April 9, 2003 \*. By Barik Schuber \*\***

This paper attempts to analyse the reasons that paved the way for the US administration to take the decision of direct military intervention and change the political regime in Iraq in 2003 and not in 1991, focusing on changing economic interest of the USA in the region which influenced that decision.

There is near consensus among Iraqi political analysts that the American intervention to change the regime in 2003 did not happen out of love for Iraqi people and to save them from the oppression of the previous totalitarian regime. Rather, in my view, it came about as a result of new US geostrategic calculations and interests in securing energy supply from the Middle East region, completely different from those that prevailed in the aftermath of the Kuwait War in 1991.

History recorded the heinous defeat of the army of the former regime after its adventure in Kuwait and the spontaneous popular uprising that began with soldiers withdrawing from the losing battle in Basra, which spread at lightning speed to the rest of the southern and northern provinces, and bolstered with the encouragement of the US President at the time, George Bush senior, in a speech calling on the Iraqis to continue the uprising until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This spontaneous uprising represented the last opportunity for change from within Iraq, but it was aborted due to firstly regional factors related primarily to the economic interests of some Arab countries that were allied with the United States, and secondly for sectarian reasons.

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Historical events testify to how the US president at the time changed his stance radically shortly after his first speech, as he began repeating daily in the media that America does not interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq and that its mission ended with the liberation of Kuwait. This changed stance sent a clear message to the head of the former regime that America had abandoned its decision to overthrow him and paving the way for him to pounce on the Shiaa rebels in the south and Kurds in north of Iraq and liquidate them in the most brutal ways.

A sound political analyst must raise the following question: What happened during this short period that made the president of the largest country in the world renege on his words in a flagrant manner? Events testify to the flurry of shuttle moves between Riyadh and Washington by Bush's senior national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, which paved the way for a change in the US president's position on the popular uprising in southern and northern Iraq. Bush Senior and his national security adviser admitted in their joint book *A World Transformed*, published in 1998, that America's refusal to move its army towards Baghdad to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime was made because of the unwillingness of the allied countries in the region to overthrow the Iraqi state, and because of the concern of the United States for changing the balance of power in the Arab (Persian) Gulf and America's unwillingness to occupy and rule Iraq.

This justification includes clear fallacies, the first of which is that the American forces did not need to march into Baghdad to overthrow the dictator because the uprising spread at lightning speed to 14 provinces out of a total of 18, and the fall of Baghdad at the hands of the uprising was only a matter of time. As for the second fallacy, it is that America did not need to rule Iraq as an occupier, and the Iraqis were able to rule

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themselves after a short transitional period under the tutelage of the United Nations.

The great irony is that the same Republican Party, led by the son of the former president, implemented all these steps that George Bush Senior wanted to avoid. This raises the question about the reasons for changing the American position on Saddam Hussein's regime and the decision to overthrow him after the long suffering of the Iraqi people under a double siege: externally by international sanctions, and domestically by dictatorial regime's stifling of people's freedoms.

The change in the American position did not come about by chance in the wake of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization's attack of September 11, 2001 on economic and security targets in New York and Washington, which were highly symbolic and sensitive, caused a great shock in the US administration. The participation of a large number of Saudis in carrying out these attacks had a clear impact on shaking the trust between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This event was preceded by the political stance of the late Saudi Crown Prince at the time, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who was highly critical of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians, which upset the Israeli lobby, known for its wide influence in America and on the neo-conservative George W. Bush administration.

Some colleagues and friends may remember my opinion in dialogues with them that the belated American decision to overthrow the former regime in 2003 did not come to deliver Iraqis from injustice and oppression, but rather as a result of the shaky trust with Saudi Arabia and as a punishment for its pro-Palestinian policies on the one hand and its blind adoption of the strict Wahhabi doctrine from which the jihadi terrorist movements like Al Qaeda sprang.



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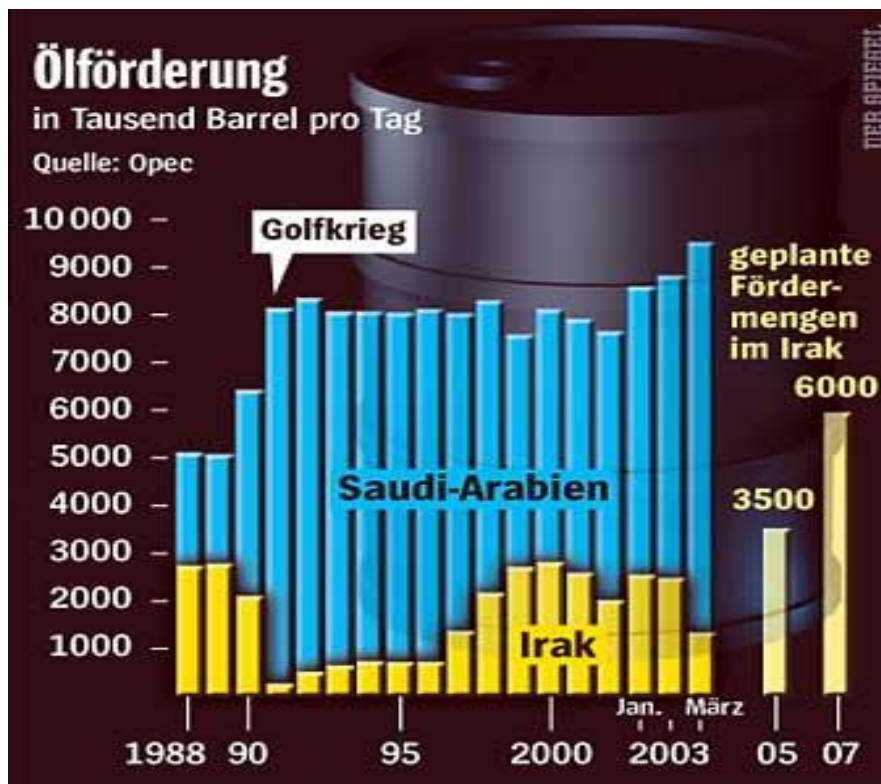
This became evident with the declaration of the Bush doctrine and the neo-conservatives that the reason for the emergence of terrorist jihadist movements in the Middle East lies with the authoritarian political systems and the stifling of freedoms. Therefore, from their point of view, it is necessary to spread democracy in these countries and to make the new Iraqi experiment a model that radiates to all countries in the region. So, the declared goal of the Bush doctrine was to introduce democracy to Iraq, but the unannounced economic goal was to rehabilitate Iraq as the largest oil exporter in the Middle East and as an alternative to Saudi Arabia, which represented its main Arab ally in coordinating oil policies and ensuring energy supplies to capitalist countries, especially since Saudi Arabia was the largest producing country in the Middle East and the largest international oil exporter at that time.

The American decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime carried, in my conviction, an implicit message to the rulers of Saudi Arabia: "We carried out your requests to keep Saddam Hussein's regime in power in 1991, but you stabbed us in the back through your involvement, albeit indirectly, in the September 11 attacks, and if you believe you can use the oil card against us, then you are delusional. There is an alternative, which is the new Iraq."

The widely circulated German magazine *Der Spiegel*, known for its network of strong relations with governmental and intelligence decision-making centres, in its issue No. 19 of May 5, 2003, published an investigative report entitled "Iraq and Breaking Saudi Hegemony" on American approaches towards rehabilitating the Iraqi oil sector and raising production to 6 million barrels per day until 2007 to put Iraq back in the international oil market as a major player to break Saudi hegemony. The report also indicated that US advisors put

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forward before the Iraqis the idea of privatizing the oil sector, but they were met with strong rejection, prompting them to abandon it early. The following figure shows the US plan to upgrade the Iraqi oil sector in terms of raising production levels compared to Saudi production.



Source: Der Spiegel

It is clear to followers of events who the despotic countries are that were targeted by the doctrine of Bush Jr at the forefront of which stood the Gulf states, which immediately understood this message and began to act on several fronts, the first of which was the diplomatic front, as it exerted unremitting efforts in making one concession after another and showing absolute loyalty to the Bush administration. Eventually, they succeeded in restoring confidence with the Bush Jr. administration. Thereafter, bilateral relations suffered some coldness during Obama's term, but a major a

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development occurred after Donald Trump's accession to the presidential chair and Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) to the Saudi crown prince's chair, who understood what America wanted, specifically the mercantilist mentality of the new American president. MBS bought the lost trust from Trump for a generous amount estimated at more than 300 billion dollars. In this regard, I do not rule out a relationship between the arrest of a group of Saudi billionaires under the pretext of corruption and the exigencies of financing his deal with Donald Trump. Here, the *fait accompli* must be recognized, which is the final closure of the September 11 file and the removal of risks to Saudi Arabia's position in the international oil market. With the removal of the Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia's oil position in the international market, Saudi diplomacy allows itself, and from the position of the strong big brother, to extend its hand to Iraq for economic and commercial cooperation, especially since the Iraqi market has become of great importance to the exports of neighbouring countries Iran and Turkey, and the rising Saudi industries aspiring to have a guaranteed share in this market. This was clearly shown by the large Saudi presence in the recent Baghdad International Fair.

As for the new political class in Iraq, most of its representatives in power did not understand the new American strategy in the region and its goals because of their lack of insight and political sophistication. They were ensconced in their old ideas, dominated by ideology and lack pragmatic thinking. This appeared in their oscillating positions and the absence of balance in the relationship with the United States on the one hand and with neighbouring Iran on the other. The only exception might have understood the message was the former Oil Minister Mr. Hussain Al-Shahristani who worked on increasing oil production up to 12 million b/d in cooperation with international oil companies by

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concluding the four round of oil service contracts during the period 2009-2012. Obviously this plan did not work for several reasons which have been discussed in research papers by many Iraqi experts like [Dr. Ali Merza](#) und [Dr. Nabil Al-Marsoumi](#) and others (see their publication on the [Arabic website of the Iraqi Economists Network.](#))

It should be noted that the successive Iraqi governments neglected to build scientific research centres and develop research cadres specialized in Iraq's international and inter-state relationships with important countries such as the United States of America, which could have helped prepare for rational political decision-making that preserves the national interest.

This political class, because of its preoccupation with conflicts over the distribution of the oil rent with weak experience and political sophistication, also failed to contain the convulsive reactions of neighbouring countries (with the exception of seasoned Iran) to the project of change in Iraq and the region and their constant attempts to abort Bush's project to democratize the region, not by confronting America directly but by supporting terrorist operations and the so-called "resistance to the occupation" on Iraqi soil with the aim of destabilizing security and political stability, and in order to thwart the young democratic experience and the advancement of the Iraqi economy.

It can be said that the lack of foresight and political acumen of the new rulers caused new economic, material and human damage that included systematic terrorist attacks on oil installations, electricity transmission lines and other infrastructure, as well as large human losses, which could have been avoided if previous governments had acted wisely with the hostile neighbouring countries. The late Iraqi economist and politician, Dr Mahdi al-Hafiz, rightly pointed



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out the historical error in not electing the veteran Iraqi politician Adnan al-Pachachi, who enjoyed broad respect internationally and particularly in the Gulf. Al-Hafiz stressed his point by saying, "If this had been done, the course of political history in Iraq would have changed."

Judging the extent of the success or failure of the new political class in Iraq in facing the challenges after April 9, 2003, including confronting the activities of neighbouring Arab countries hostile to the Iraqi young democratic experiment and the tasks of advancing the ruined Iraqi economy for more than two decades, as well as evaluating the extent of benefiting from the opportunities that were available to Iraq after this historical event that is pivotal to realising the aspirations of the Iraqi citizen to improve his standard of living, will be the subject of my next research paper on the economic outcome of political change since April 9, 2003 until this day.

(\* ) This paper was written in Arabic and published in April 2018. The translation was done by Mr. Misbah Kamal

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