

# Israel's Policies to The US-Iraq Wars of 1991 and 2003: a Realist Approach

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## **Abstract**

The United States waged two important wars against Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein, which had significant regional and global consequences. Israeli policy and decision-makers, among whom the IDF was strongly influential as well, followed realist policies on these wars based on interest calculations. This article studies and makes an analysis of Israeli policies on both wars. In this vein, the article firstly touches upon the theory of realism to emphasize the role of interest defined in terms of power in foreign policy. Then, this article argues that Israel made rational choices in the US-Iraq Wars of 1991 and 2003. Finally, the article concludes that Israel continues to be guided first and foremost by national security concerns in the implementation of its foreign policy, which corresponds to the thinking of realist theory, as recently seen in the Syrian civil war, which erupted in March 2011.

**Keywords:** Realism, Interest, Power, Israel, US, Iraq

## **Introduction**

With the outbreak of the Gulf War, the global audience for the first time witnessed a heavily televised war during which they “saw live missiles striking targets and fighters taking off from aircraft carriers” (McFadden, 2012). Iraq retaliated to the attacks by firing missiles at Israel and Saudi Arabia. Ofra Bengio states, “President Saddam Husayn told Arab officials in early 1993 that Iraq’s missile attacks on Israel had avenged Israel’s attack of Iraq’s nuclear reactor in June 1981” (Bengio, 1998: 32).

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<sup>1</sup> This article reflects only Dr. Ünal’s his own views and analysis

The Gulf war started with the invasion of Iraqi armed forces in Kuwait on August 2, 1990 and then annexed the country. The United Nations has made various efforts to get Iraq to withdraw its troops from Kuwait but Iraq has refused. Therefore, on November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 678, giving a deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait before the 15 January 1991. Otherwise, the UN gives a mandate to member countries to use "all necessary means" (UNSCR). On 15 January, the UN Security Council deadline passed, however Iraq did not withdraw its forces from Kuwait. This was the reason for the US, together with its coalition, to launch a military campaign, "Operation Desert Storm" with the aim of liberating Kuwait.<sup>2</sup>

The member of US coalition are United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and some other Arab countries. Israel was excluded from becoming an official member of the coalition although Iraq's scud missiles that had a range of 600 km targeted Israel. Leslie Stein explains the reason for this exclusion: "President Bush insisted that on no account was Israel to join in the fighting even if attacked... as the Arab countries would be unwilling to be seen as being in any alliance with Israel" (Stein, 2014: 209). To Gilbert, it was not thinkable to the Arabs in the coalition to be in the same alliance with a Jewish state that was striking an Arab state (Gilbert, 2014: 964). In other words, the Bush administration avoided any steps, which could undermine the consensus reached in the Arab world against Iraq.

Israel indeed contemplated on whether or not to retaliate against the Iraqi missile offensive that had hit some parts of the Israeli lands. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Commander in Chief of the Israeli Air Force Major General Avihu Ben-Nun favored retaliation (Peri, 2005: 329). Israel's influential political actors Ariel Sharon and Ezer Weizman, former military commanders, also opposed the idea of remaining passive (Gilbert, 2014: 966). According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Iraq attacked Israel with various types of weapons, including non-conventional ones, and the country faced "a real threat of destruction with non-conventional weapons" for the first time in its history (MFA Gov, 1991).

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Chief of Staff of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) Lieutenant General Dan Shomron and Head of Intelligence Division of the IDF Major General Amnon Lipkin-Shahak believed that "Israel should not operate

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Defense provides the following information on the operation: "The U.S. and 40 allied nations, including several Arab nations, flew more than 18,000 air deployment missions, more than 116,000 combat air sorties and dropped 88,500 tons of bombs". (<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/story/Article/1728715/desert-storm-a-look-back/>), March 11, 2020 accessed.

without US consent and potentially jeopardize the progress of coalition forces in their war against Iraq. In the event, the latter view prevailed” (Peri, 2005: 329).

This article studies and analyzes Israeli policy in the US-Iraq wars by using realism theory to emphasize the role of interests defined in terms of power in foreign policy. This study was carried out using qualitative methods using data from literature studies.

## Realism

Realism is widely regarded as the dominant school of thought in International Relations theory. Following the Great Debate, which took place in the late 1930s and early 1940s between realists and idealists, the account is that “realists emerged victorious, and the rest of the international relations story is, in many respects, a footnote to realism” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011: 86). The core elements of realism can be summarized with the three “S”: namely Statism, Survival and Self-help. To briefly explain, state is the key actor of international relations. State is the ultimate sovereign within its territory, and has the authority to make and enforce laws. Beyond its territories, there is no external authority, which indicates an anarchic international system. For this reason, survival is the main objective of states in the anarchic environment. States can realize their securities through self-help in the absence of any higher authority to prevent or counter the use of force. As a result, states behave rationally and make rational choices accordingly. In this framework, the concept of interest defined in terms of power plays an essential role in international politics. By referring to power politics, the leading realist thinkers, such as Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, share the view that international politics is an arena of rivalry, conflict and war (Jackson and Sorensen, 2007: 60).<sup>3</sup>

Hans Morgenthau assumes that “moving force is the aspiration for power of sovereign nations”, and “international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power”. While making a clear separation of domestic and international politics, Morgenthau

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Third Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.60. For detailed information on realism: Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, “Realism”, in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics*, Fifth Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.84-99. David A. Baldwin’s study provides an invaluable contribution on power and international relations: David A. Baldwin, *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016. Steven Forde gives comprehensive information on realist thinkers: Steven Forde, “Classical Realism”, in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (Eds.), *Traditions of International Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.62-84; Steven Forde, “International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.39, Issue 2, June 1995, pp.141-160.

considers that they are two different manifestations of the same phenomenon: “to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power” (Morgenthau, 1948). It should be noted that states try to maximize their relative power position over other states (Mearsheimer, 1994: 1). On this point, John Baylis and Steve Smith attach importance to military force and state the following: “world politics is all about bargaining and alliances, with a key mechanism for balancing various national interests, but finally the most important tool available for implementing states’ foreign policies is military force” (Baylis, 2011: 4). On the other side, Morgenthau, who systematized realism on the basis of six principles in his revised book *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, remarks about the concept of interest defined in terms of power that “provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood”. According to Morgenthau, the idea of interest is in fact the essence of politics and is unaffected by the conditions of time and place (Morgenthau, 1978: 4-15).

Among an array of realist schools of thought, I will be guided by Morgenthau’s thinking and emphasizing that international politics is driven by a struggle for power, in order to support the main argument of this article.

### **The Gulf War of 1991**

The dissolution of the Socialist bloc in the late 1980s drastically changed the international order. The bipolar international system based on the US-USSR rivalry turned into a unipolar structure led by the US. Israel, one of the only two pro-Western democracies in the Middle East -the other one being Turkey- was on the winning side. Moreover, former Soviet allies in the region could no longer receive military and economic assistance from a superpower since the final collapse of the USSR in December 1991. For Israel, this created an environment conducive to advancing its foreign policy goals in the region.

Iraq was one of the traditional recipients of Soviet assistance. However, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had launched *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) in the USSR in the mid-1980s, and the Soviet Union was in a phase of rapprochement with the West under the vision of a ‘common European Home’. Consequently, Iraq was no longer benefitting from Soviet support; and in fact, the Soviet leadership chose to act together with the US and the West against the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

Iraqi armed forces invaded oil-rich Kuwait on August 2, 1990 and then annexed the country. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 660 of 2 August 1990,

condemning the invasion of Kuwait and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces. It is important to indicate that the Resolution was adopted by 14 votes to none, and one member, Yemen, did not participate in the vote (UNSCR). On the other side, US military officials initiated planning for operations to defend Saudi Arabia from any possible attacks from Iraq. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, US Commander in the Middle East, moved his Headquarters to Riyadh, and US forces began to arrive in Saudi Arabia. In response to the UN's demand for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, Martin Gilbert writes that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein countered by offering an Iraqi withdrawal in return for an Israeli and Syrian withdrawal from southern Lebanon and an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. This proposal was rejected by the US side at the summit between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev held in Helsinki on September 8, 1990 (Gilbert, 2014: 964).

On November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 678, noting that despite all efforts by the UN, Iraq refused to comply with its obligation to implement the relevant resolutions, and authorizing Member States co-operating with the Government of Kuwait, unless Iraq on or before 15 January 1991 fully implements the relevant resolutions, to use "all necessary means" (UNSCR). On January 12, 1991, the US Congress passed a resolution authorizing the use of military force (Congress Gov). On 15 January, the UN Security Council deadline passed, however Iraq did not withdraw its forces from Kuwait.

On 17 January, the US-led UN coalition launched a military campaign "Operation Desert Storm" spearheaded by air and missile attacks to liberate Kuwait (Defense Gov). The attitude of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) on the matter at this point is of particular interest. PLO leader Yasser Arafat chose to give support to Iraq at a time when almost all leading Arab rulers were openly against Iraq's aggression. To several, it was a strategic mistake. David W. Lesch claims that almost overnight the Palestinians lost the international goodwill they had gained during the first Intifada (uprising). Moreover, the PLO lost both political and financial support from the Arab Gulf states. As a result, the PLO was notably weakened (Lesch, 2009: 199).

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Chief of Staff of the IDF Lieutenant General Dan Shomron and Head of Intelligence Division of the IDF Major General Amnon Lipkin-Shahak believed that "Israel should not operate without US consent and potentially jeopardize the progress of coalition forces in their war against Iraq. In the event, the latter view prevailed" (Peri, 2005: 329). On this point, it seems possible to say that Israeli decision-makers took the balance of power in the region into account. By doing so, the IDF benefitted from Patriot air defense systems and other types of US defense support, which bolstered Israel's anti-missile capacity and its security in general, though Bengio

reminds that there was also criticism over the Patriot systems for the failure to grant any protection to Israel (Bengio, 2020). Furthermore, Eytan Gilboa considers that Israel was able to benefit from the sympathy of the international community by refraining from retaliation (Gilboa, 2006: 715). Hence, we can conclude that Israel made a rational choice in the war in line with the concept of interest defined in terms of power.

After almost a one and half month long war, the coalition advanced on the ground. At the end of February, President Hussein announced that Iraq would withdraw from Kuwait; the coalition forces entered Kuwait City and Iraq formally announced that it would abide by all UNSC resolutions regarding the conflict. On February 27, President George Bush addressed the American people from the Oval Office and stated the following: "Kuwait is liberated. Iraq's army is defeated. Our military objectives are met. Kuwait is once more in the hands of Kuwaitis, in control of their own destiny" (Haass, 2009: 163). Finally, on 3 March, Iraq accepted the terms of a ceasefire agreement presented by General Schwarzkopf. The UN Security Council received a letter from the Iraqi government announcing the required acceptance. The conditions agreed to by Iraq were as follows:

**MINEFIELDS:** Iraq will provide maps of minefields in Kuwait and offshore so that removal operations can begin.

**WITHDRAWAL:** Allied forces will withdraw from occupied territory in Iraq when a final cease-fire agreement is signed, not before.

**POWs:** Release of prisoners of war and civilian hostages is to be made immediately, with details to be worked out by the International Red Cross with full cooperation by both sides. A symbolic release was to occur immediately.

**MIAs:** Iraqis have been given the names of all troops missing in action and agreed to provide information as soon as possible about them. Iraq is also to provide names of those who may have died in custody and to return the remains (Chen, 1991).

For the Israeli side, Iraq represented a country, which took part in actions against Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973, and fired Scud missiles at Israel during the Gulf War of 1991 (Danon, 2012). Iraq was also the only Arab country of the 1991 war to have attacked Israel without any coalition, yet it constituted the sole aggressor to whom Israel did not retaliate (Bengio, 1998: 33). Israel was capable of defending itself from Iraqi missiles, and the US-led coalition was strong enough to defeat Iraqi forces without the IDF's support. Under the circumstances, it seems that Israel accomplished its strategic

goals without taking kinetic action even though President Hussein remained in power. At the end of the day, Iraq could no longer boast conventional or unconventional missiles, and constitute a threat for Israel, at least in the short term. According to Lesch, the defeat of Iraqi forces diminished any serious threat emanating from the Arab east, a strategic concern for some time (Lesch, 2009: 200). In addition, President Hussein lost both popularity in the Arab world and any chance to play an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian relations.

### **Interwar Years (1991-2003)**

After the Gulf War, several significant issues came to the fore on the agenda of Israeli politics. First, just after the Gulf War, the Middle East peace conference convened in Madrid in October 1991 with the participation of Israeli, Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian delegations at the behest of President Bush. The conference dealt with Israeli-Palestinian relations and Israeli-Arab relations. On September 13, 1993, Israel and the PLO agreed to recognize each other. On October 26, 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty formally ending 45 years of hostility. On September 28, 1995, Israel and the PLO signed an interim agreement, which recognized the formation of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority. These developments during the 1990s increased hopes for reaching solutions to long-lasting conflicts in the region despite negative developments, such as the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist in November 4, 1995, and a series of suicidal attacks of early 1996 in Israel by Hamas in response to Israeli assassinations of Jihad leaders, such as Fathi Shaqaqi (Lesch, 2009: 202-203).

However, the Camp David summit of July 2000 between US President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO leader Yasser Arafat to make a final agreement failed; then Likud Chairman Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount in September 2000; and consequently, the second Intifada began in the same month. In addition, the following peace attempt at the summit between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the Egyptian resort of Taba in January 2001 proved to be inconclusive. Moreover, Sharon, who was elected Prime Minister in February 2001, declared his refusal to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority (Gilbert, 2008, 2011).

In October 2001, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine shot Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi dead in Jerusalem. In return, Sharon sent troops to Ramallah in December 2001 to surround Arafat's compound, thereby physically locking him down on the premises. The IDF conducted a large-scale military campaign "Operation Defensive Shield" in March 2002 (IDF, 2002). The operation

escalated the conflict further. Nevertheless, there were new peace initiatives, including President George W. Bush's road map, for reaching an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority until the second war between the US and Iraq, but none of them bore fruit.

As for other developments, Prime Minister Barak came together with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara in Washington in December 1999 to have talks on a peace deal. The negotiations mainly focused on the Golan Heights and Lake Galilee. In spite of this, Syrian President Hafez Assad's meeting with President Clinton in Geneva in February 2000 revealed that Syria would not be willing to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish State (Stein, 2014: 243). On the other side, in May 2000, Prime Minister Barak withdrew all Israeli forces from Southern Lebanon. According to Stein, Israel received informal assurances that "the Lebanese Army would take possession of the land forfeited by Israel and that the UN forces would monitor the area in question to ensure that it would not be used as a guerilla staging post", implying Iran-sponsored Hezbollah; however, over time, Hezbollah increased its military presence and weaponry in the region (Stein, 2014: 244).

Within this context, Israeli policy and decision-makers intensified peace talks with regional actors to achieve agreements during the interwar years. On this point, it is crucial to emphasize that Israel enjoyed a better bargaining position than during the Cold War years. American influence in the Middle East was higher at the time and conventional or unconventional threats to Israeli security diminished. So, the existing circumstances offered Israel the right balance between interest and power during the term.

### **The US-Iraq War of 2003**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on US soil, which were orchestrated by al-Qaeda and resulted in a significant number of fatalities and injuries, became a watershed in American foreign and security policy, consequently on world politics. Soon after this terrible event, which in time came to be known as "the 9/11 attacks", American internal security arrangements were tightened to ensure the homeland's security. Externally, President George W. Bush, the son of former President George Bush, declared a war against terrorism. Purportedly, democratizing the Middle East and unlocking its human potential were presented as justification for wars in the region (Yahya, 2019: 50). On this point, it is noteworthy to indicate that the definition of the Middle East, particularly where it begins and ends, has always been a source of disagreement among scholars; and expressions like "the Middle East", "the new Middle



East” and “the Greater Middle East (Project)” were broadly utilized in political and academic discussions.

In relation to the 9/11 attacks, which had also claimed the lives of five Israeli citizens, Israeli rulers underlined the fact that they had been fighting against terrorism for a long time, and that now was the time to show solidarity with the US. Accordingly, the Israeli government declared a day of mourning on 12 September, and emphasized the need for a collective effort in the fight against terrorism. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres made this statement:

Clearly, it requires a more serious, concerted and comprehensive response against terrorism in every country. We must be uncompromising against terrorism. We know of many countries that are centers of terrorism. We must not allow them to play with the lives of innocent people... In addition to the United States, we must enlist the help of Europe, Russia, India, China and all responsible countries, since this is a danger that threatens the entire globe (MFA Gov, 2001).

Within this context, al-Qaeda became the main target of this effort, and US policy-makers accordingly turned their eyes on Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda had found refuge in. That said, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were not Afghan citizens (Woodward, 2002).<sup>4</sup> However, terrorism experts considered that the assassination of Ahmad Shah Masood, commander of the Northern Alliance and anti-Taliban coalition in Afghanistan, on September 9, 2001, just two days before the 9/11 attacks assured al-Qaeda’s leader Osama bin Laden protection by the Taliban (CFR). Following the attacks, President W. Bush called upon the Taliban regime to deliver al-Qaeda leaders to the US, but to no avail. Subsequently, the US military launched “Operation Enduring Freedom” against the Taliban in the light of political support of leading NATO members, such as the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Turkey. It should also be noted that NATO allies voted unanimously to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty on collective defense for the first time in its history. On November 14, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1378, which led the UN establish a transitional administration and invite member states

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<sup>4</sup> The US authorities indeed tried to capture bin Laden in Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks. Bob Woodward gives details with following: “The CIA had been after bin Laden for more than five years, and increasingly so after the devastating 1998 bin Laden–sponsored terrorist bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that had left more than 200 people dead. At that time, President Clinton directed the U.S. military to launch 66 cruise missiles into terrorist training camps in Afghanistan where bin Laden was believed to be in a high-level meeting. But he had apparently left a few hours before the missiles arrived. In 1999, the CIA commenced a covert operation to train 60 commandos from the Pakistani intelligence agency to enter Afghanistan to capture bin Laden. But the operation was aborted because of a military coup in Pakistan.” From Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, p.20.

to send peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan (UNSCR). Finally, bin Laden escaped from Afghanistan, the Taliban regime ended and an interim government was formed.

During this process, Lesch considers that President W. Bush pressured Prime Minister Sharon to reach a ceasefire in the Intifada to facilitate Bush's attempt to build a coalition against the Taliban in the Arab and Muslim world; however, it did not mean to sacrifice Israel at the expense of the West's appeasement of the Arab world (Lesch, 2009: 216).

In fact, Israel gave its support to the US in its fight against terrorism but the IDF was not necessarily always on the ground like the US campaign in Afghanistan. There were reports to be confirmed that Prime Minister Sharon ordered Israeli authorities to provide any kind of support needed, such as intelligence sharing. As a testament to the implications of the level of the bilateral American-Israeli cooperation, it might be significant to remember that eight years after the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden warned the US on the consequences of this relationship by stating the following: "The reason for our dispute with you is your support for your ally Israel, occupying our land in Palestine" (Reuters). Israel, in the view of Sharon, was acting against the Palestinian Authority, in a similar manner to what the US was attempting to do in Afghanistan: "root out terror"; therefore, Arafat and the PLO were nothing more than another version of bin Laden and al-Qaeda (Lesch, 2009: 217).

After having toppled the Taliban regime, the American administration this time turned its eyes on Iraq. Since the Gulf War, the US had engaged in "a low-grade undeclared war to keep Saddam in a box". Bob Woodward remarks, "U.S. warplanes enforced two no-fly zones in Iraq, where Saddam was not permitted to fly any aircraft. U.S. pilots, permitted by U.N. resolution, had entered Iraqi airspace 150,000 times in the last decade" (Woodward, 2006: 142). In his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, President W. Bush identified Iraq as a member of the "Axis of Evil" together with Iran and North Korea. He notably said, "Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade... This is a regime that agreed to international inspections-then kicked out the inspectors" (Wayback Machine).

Similarly, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon portrayed Iraq in the same light. At the ceremony in his country on the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Prime Minister Sharon said the following:

A year has passed since the assault by the forces of terror and evil... Bin Laden's suicide terror, the terrorism of Hamas, Tanzim and Hizbullah, the terrorism engineered by the Palestinian Authority, Saddam Hussein's involvement in and

support for Palestinian terrorism, and the terrorist networks directed by Iran are all inseparable components of that same axis of evil which threatens peace and stability everywhere in the world... Countries such as Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria, which support terrorist organizations and use terror to achieve their objectives, are precisely the same countries working tirelessly to acquire weapons of mass destruction... We will continue to support President Bush and his Administration in the campaign to remove the threat of the Axis of Evil and the forces of terror from our lives (Haaretz).

On September 12, 2002, one year after the 9/11 attacks, President W. Bush addressed the UN General Assembly, and warned that military action would be unavoidable if Iraq did not comply with relevant UN resolutions on disarmament. On November 8, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1441, which provided Iraq “a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations” and warned of “serious consequences” if it did not (UNSCR). However, the UN’s Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission failed to find the WMDs in spite of inspections in Iraq. Moreover, on February 25, 2003, France, Germany and Russia opposed a US-UK draft resolution to the UN on calling Iraq on disarmament. In the light of these developments, the US administration abandoned its attempts at the UN, and on March 17, gave President Hussein 48 hours to leave his country or face war. Hussein simply rejected, and then “Operation Iraqi Freedom” began on 20 March to end his 24 year-rule in Iraq with the unsubstantiated claim that his regime had the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and ties with Al Qaeda.

However, this time, significantly different from the first Gulf war, on which the leading Western actors reached a political and military consensus for action, there were inconclusive discussions and, what is more, deep disagreements on the necessity to wage war against Iraq. Those arguments finally caused a profound division of the transatlantic sphere. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld made a distinction between “old Europe” and “new Europe”. According to him, NATO members Germany and France -the former opposed the use of force in Iraq, and the latter hinted that it could use its veto at the UN Security Council to block a second resolution mandating an armed attack- were “old Europe”. On the other side, fresh NATO members, namely Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, former communists that supported US policies in Iraq, represented “new Europe”. Actually, the distinction was not related to being “old” or “new” members of NATO. The UK, Italy and Spain, which backed the US position, were older NATO members. Therefore, this distinction was all about US thinking on Europe (Baker, 2003). So, transatlantic relations suffered a rift seldom seen

since the US bound itself politically and institutionally to Europe after the Second World War (Heller, 2003: 1).

Politically speaking, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt stated the Israeli leadership regarded the war with Iraq of 2003 as “the first step in an ambitious campaign to remake the Middle East” (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006: 59). The end of President Hussein’s rule would contribute to Israeli interests. There was no doubt that Israel’s close ally, the US, would play a prominent role in the remaking of Iraq. Israel could benefit from this new paradigm in the region. Militarily speaking, Ephraim Kam said, the prevailing view within the IDF was that the chances of an Iraqi missile attack with conventional or non-conventional warheads were low. Moreover, Iraq lacked the political motivation to launch attacks on Israel in contrast to the time of the Gulf War, and Iraq’s capacity to strike Israel had been weakened as a result of the latter’s strengthened anti-missile capacity through “the Arrow” system (Kam, 2003: 2). Similarly, the Israeli Chief of Staff and military viewed low Iraqi capabilities and high quality Israeli defenses as a state of play to their advantage, which defined the actual Iraqi threat to Israel as being very low (Goodman, 2003: 29-30). Israeli intelligence shared the same point of view. Kam added, “An attack might occur primarily in the event that Saddam was facing a complete military defeat and the crumbling of his regime... The likelihood that Saddam would order the launching of missiles against Israel early in the war of before it began was even lower” (Kam, 2003: 22).<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence of the military campaign, President Hussein relinquished control over Baghdad to US forces on 9 April, and President W. Bush declared victory on 1 May. Unlike in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, this time the Iraqi state-system was dismantled, the army dissolved and the Ba’ath Party officially banned. These developments dramatically altered the traditional pillars of the country, and the ensuing vacuum triggered an atmosphere of chaos and power struggle, which has continued to plague Iraq to this day. In this atmosphere, tribal leaders and tribalism gained strength, new political parties mushroomed, and the role of religiously tainted slogans and movements intensified. Bengio portrays the situation as such: “At the macro level, it has brought about the collapse of the Sunni Center and the rise of previously peripheral forces, the Shi’is and the Kurds. At the micro level, it has caused the disintegration of a centralized political system and atomized Iraqi society and polity” (Bengio, 2003: 1).

From the Israeli perspective, the risk of a full-scale war had receded with the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, there was no guarantee for the security of Israel in the

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<sup>5</sup> Besides Kam, Shlomo Brom’s study provides an invaluable brief on Israeli intelligence: Shlomo Brom, “The Steinetz Report: Israeli Intelligence after Iraq”, *Tel Aviv Notes*, April 4, 2004, No.103.

absence of a governing central authority in Iraq. The power vacuum introduced new security threats, such as the increasing activities of terrorist organizations and, above all, the growing influence of Iran in the country. While it was hoped that Iraq would not be a safe haven for worldwide terrorist networks, in reality, it morphed into a breeding ground for their activities. The advent of new terrorist organizations, especially DEASH, quickly became a leading and imminent security concern. An important relevant consideration had to do with the fact that Shia Muslims form almost 60% of the Iraqi population. There are close relations between Iraqi and Iranian Shia clergies, which could enable Iran to strengthen its reach into Iraq and beyond, thereby extending the Shiite sphere. This challenge, coupled with Iran's continuously improvement of its military and nuclear arsenal, constitutes a significant source of concern for Israel. These factors could potentially change and redefine the balance of power in the Middle East. The following Arab spring has actually already triggered dynamics of power politics in the region. Israel faces a new state of affairs in the light of developments in its neighboring countries, Egypt and Syria. In particular, the ongoing war in Syria that erupted in March 2011 has been a litmus test for Israel's foreign and security policy in the light of growing Iranian military presence (Kam, 2019).<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

During the Cold War, Israel was a staunch ally of the United States in the Middle East. Similarly, Israel has maintained its close relationship with the American administrations in the post-Cold War era. Besides many other regional issues, the US' wars of 1991 and of 2003 with Iraq were vitally important for Israeli foreign and security policy. By analyzing Israel's position during those wars, this article comes to the conclusion that Israeli policy and decision-makers made rational preferences, in which the concept of interest defined in terms of power played a crucial role, and they followed realist policies by prioritizing the survival of their state accordingly. It should also be noted that Israel had an opportunity to maximize its relative power position over its rivals in the region. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Israel has continued such preferences shaped by the factors of interest and power in the following regional issues, such as the Arab Spring. So, the theory of realism provides an explanation for the formulation of Israeli foreign and security policy.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of Iranian presence in Syria from an Israeli perspective: Ephraim Kam, *Iranian Stakes in Syria*, *JNSS*, Special Publication, November 12, 2019.

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