



## The U.S. Geopolitical Code and the Role of the Persian Gulf Oil in the U.S. Military Intervention in 2003

Saeid Naji\* and Jayum A. Jawan

*Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the motives of the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region vis-a-vis the energy resources of the region. Studying geopolitical codes helps reveal the intentions behind a state's foreign policy through defining national interests, threats, actions and justification. Examining the U.S. code suggests the importance of oil as a vital strategic interest for the country. It defines the preservation of the U.S. hegemonic position as an ultimate goal for its presence in the Persian Gulf. In this respect, the threat of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government to three vast fields of energy reservoirs in the Persian Gulf made it necessary to affect regime change so as to protect the free flow of oil to the West and this was done through the control and preservation of the U.S. hegemonic position.

*Keywords:* U.S. geopolitical code, Persian Gulf's energy resources, the Bush Administration, pre-emptive war, U.S. hegemonic position

### INTRODUCTION

The Persian Gulf region has always been considered a strategic area among powerful countries since the earlier centuries because of its geostrategic location and especially its energy resources. It became particularly important during the First World War when

Britain shifted the fuel source of its Royal Navy ships from coal to oil (Yergin, 2006). This region has also been significant to the United States of America since before the Second World War, and especially so after Britain's withdrawal from the region in 1971 when the U.S. military presence in the region was reinforced. This was evident in the U.S. leader's statements, in particular after the Oil Crisis in 1973, which explicitly signify the importance of this region to America's vital interests. In the country's military response against any aggression in this area, the following excerpt asserts one

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*E-mail addresses:*

Naji\_Saeid@yahoo.com (Saeid Naji),

jayum@upm.edu.my (Jayum A. Jawan)

\* Corresponding author

of the most notable statements made by President Carter in 1980;

*“Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”*

Basically, due to its position as America’s vital interest, this area became the prominent geopolitical assumption during the Cold War era and had been linked to the U.S. geopolitical code, which was generally referred to as the Containment Policy. It therefore played an important role as a major factor in the U.S., who pursued different policies against the Soviet Union expansionism. It was directly related to the existence of vast amounts of oil and gas in this area, and of the dependence of the U.S. and its allies on these resources. According to Levy (1980), the Persian Gulf supplied over 30 per cent of America’s oil imports, 60 per cent of Western Europe’s needs and more than 70 per cent of Japan’s demands. In this respect, the main defined threat was Soviet expansionism towards the West’s geostrategic realm and its interests. To prevent a growing Soviet influence in this area and to protect America’s vital interests, especially in the free flow of oil to the West, different policies, such as the ‘Twin Pillars’, were projected towards the

Persian Gulf. More interestingly, concurrent with the end of the Cold War era and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States increasingly attempted to redefine its geopolitical code and keep its high position in the new geopolitical order. The military attack against Iraq was carried out by an international coalition led by the United States in 1991. Bush Senior (1991) had explicitly referred to protecting oil fields in the Persian Gulf as one of the war objectives. The U.S. decision makers continued to pay to this area until the outbreak of the September 11 attacks against the U.S. symbols, which consequently caused a change in America’s geopolitical code and ultimately encouraged the U.S. government to fire up a pre-emptive war against Iraq in 2003.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of related literature shows that growing industrialization and consequently increasing demands cause the necessity to control raw materials across the world. These needs and dependence of great powers such as the United States on oil and the large reservoir of oil in the Persian Gulf area were the main reasons for tensions, conflicts and competitions. From this view, after the Cold War, securing access to oil as a vital resource had become a major theme in the U.S. security planning and this justified the use of force (Clark, 2004; Klare, 2001; Le Billon, 2004; Peters, 2004; Singh, 2007).

After the Cold War, with increasing demands for oil and replacing economic rivalries instead of ideological competitions,

great powers such as Russia, the European powers, China, Japan and even India came to the region to compete with the United States to access oil reservoirs. In this respect, the stability of supplies became the main concern among the world powers (Amirahmadi, 1996; Klare, 2001; Sen & Babali, 2007). For this reason, the control of oil was considered as “the centre of gravity of U.S. economic hegemony” (Bromley, 2006), where the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf was interpreted as gaining effective rule over the global economy for the next 50 years, which would be achieved by controlling “the global oil spigot” (Harvey, 2003, p. 24).

With reference to the Iraq Wars, however, some believe that the second Iraq War in 2003 was a continuation of the first Iraq War in 1991 (Krauthammer, 2005). Another view, on the other hand, sees the Iraq War as a normal extension of the Carter Doctrine, which posited the vital importance of the Persian Gulf to America (Klare, 2006). There is also a notion that Saddam Hussain was a serious threat to the U.S. friendly states as well as to the continued flow of large amounts of the world’s oil (Klare, 2004b). In addition, this notion also asserts that “no real improvement in either the security environment or regional production levels would be possible so long as Saddam remained in power” (Klare, 2004a, p. 94). Conversely, Clark (2004) views the United States military operation against Iraq in relation to petrodollar recycling, whereas Russell (2005) relates it to the stability of oil price. Meanwhile, other scholars such

as (Renner, 2003; Singh, 2007) refer to the military operation as the reduction of OPEC and Saudi Arabia dominance over the international oil market.

Another view refers to the oil reserves as an important element in the U.S. grand strategy, which believes that Iraq’s oil reservoir was even bigger than Saudi’s. Thus, , Iraq became a significant objective for Cheney and Bush (Iseri, 2009). This view emphasizes Iraq’s oil as the main reason for the U.S.’s attack on Iraq and it compares Iraq with North Korea, in the sense that both had been suspected of proliferating weapons of mass destruction, but only Iraq was selected for pre-emptive action (Le Billon, 2004). In this respect, Mercille (2010) stresses that “the main reason for intervention is control over world supply and not American consumption” and the United States “will seek to control the region containing two-thirds of energy resources in order to exert leverage over industrial rivals and regulate the smooth functioning of the world economy” (Mercille, 2010, p.6).

Hence, this paper analyses the U.S. geopolitical code and attempts to explore the motives of the U.S. military presence in this region in relation to the Persian Gulf oil. In addition, this study also attempts to answer this question, “How did the United States geopolitical code justify the role of the Persian Gulf oil in the U.S. military intervention in 2003 after the September 11 attacks?” Therefore, to obtain the answer, the U.S. geopolitical code will be examined and analyzed. In fact, what could distinguish this study from other similar works, is the

use of the United States geopolitical code to explain the relationship between the Persian Gulf energy reserves and the U.S. military presence in this area.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study perceives that the great world powers are always looking for opportunities to obtain more power for more security purposes. Needless to say, from an offensive realist theoretical perspective, this study also assumes that due to natural tendency, great powers always attempt to maximize their supremacy and gain a hegemonic position in international order, which has been determined as the ultimate objective of a conquest. In this respect and under the banner of offensive realism, John Mearsheimer has been a well-known participant who offers his theory in his work titled, 'The Tragedy of Great Power Politics' (Elman, 2004; Iseri, 2009; Snyder, 2002). The theory clearly provides persuasive answers to the aggressive strategies of great powers so that such strategies are considered as "a rational answer to life in the international system" (Toft, 2005, p. 381).

This theoretical approach, basically, relies on five main assumptions. First, it is assumed that the international system is anarchic and there is no dominant central power to carry out rules effectively and discipline perpetrators. It does not mean that the system is chaotic, but the international system includes independent states, and thus, none of them has any central authority above them. In this respect, "sovereignty, in other words, inheres in states because

there is no higher ruling in the international system. There is no government over government" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 30). Second, the assumption stresses that great powers have always possessed some offensive military capacities which enables them to hurt or destroy each other. From this point of view, countries are dangerous to each other, and thus, those states which have stronger military power are more dangerous than others. Third, the assumption states that no country can ever be sure about the other countries' intentions. Indeed, "no state can be sure that another state will not use its offensive military capability to attack the first state." (source ?) Nevertheless, it does not mean that every state has hostile intentions, "but it is impossible to be sure of that judgment because intentions are impossible to divine with 100 percent certainty." In fact, there are many causes for aggression, and every state can be motivated by one of them to attack the other state. What is important here is that, "intentions can change quickly," and from this viewpoint, one friendly state today can be turn to be hostile tomorrow. Therefore, "states can never be sure that other states do not have offensive intentions to go along with their offensive capabilities" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31).

The fourth assumption emphasizes that survival is sought by all states. It is, specifically, "the primary goal of great powers." Indeed, maintaining territorial integrity together and preserving autonomy of domestic political order are significant goals sought by any states. As indicated by

Mearsheimer “Survival dominates other motives because, once a state is conquered, it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue other aims.” (Mearsheimer, 2001) For this reason, security is the most important goal which is pursued by any states. Finally, the fifth assumption posits that great powers in this theory are regarded as rational entities that are conscious of their external environment. Mearsheimer (2001) reinstates this point by the following statement where he mentions, “They think strategically about how to survive in it.” Such states are able to evaluate other states’ behaviors through considering their preferences and influence of their own behavior over the behavior of other states. They also consider the influence of other states’ behavior on “their own strategy for survival” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31).

More importantly, and more related to this paper, Mearsheimer’s offensive realism theory claims that states in the international system are seeking their survival guarantee in confront of other states as potential threats. In this view, states are not able to rely on other states for their own security, and as noted by Mearsheimer (2001), “in international politics, God helps those who help themselves” (p. 33). In this respect, states make a special attempt to increase their share of power in the world. This tendency to maximize their power continues through looking for opportunities to attain more power, and they only quit the pursuit for power once a hegemony position is achieved. Therefore, according to this theory, the best way for great powers

to ensure their security “is to achieve hegemony now,” and thus, any possibility to form a challenge by any other great powers should be eliminated (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 35). “A hegemon is a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system. No other state has the military wherewithal to put up a serious fight against it. In essence, a hegemon is the only great power in the system.” From this perspective, there are conceptually “global hegemonies, which dominate the world, and regional hegemonies, which dominate distinct geographical areas” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 40).

This position offered by the offensive realism theory could be linked to the view that, with the end of the Cold War, the United States, as the sole superpower as well as the most powerful state, has always attempted to preserve and promote its hegemonic position in the new geopolitical world order. This attempt, particularly after the September 11 attacks, led to militaristic behavior compatible with offensive realist reasoning that appeared in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Obviously, these geopolitical practices and aggressive behavior were the results of redefining the U.S. geopolitical code known as the so-called ‘War on Terrorism’ (Flint, 2006).

This work relies on examining the United States geopolitical code because the foreign policy of every state is the output of those geopolitical assumptions that are behind its geopolitical code (Flint & Taylor, 2007). Such a code, indeed, “will have to incorporate a definition of a state’s interests,

an identification of external threats to those interests, a planned response to such threats and a justification for that response” (Taylor & Flint, 2000, p. 62). Therefore, analyzing the United States geopolitical code for a specific period of time helps understand America’s interests in the Persian Gulf region, the threats to these interests, and the military intervention as a response to those threats. With reference to the offensive realist approach, it obviously indicates that all attempts and practices of the United States as a great power, such as the Iraq War, are interpretable in order to respond to a threat and prevent the emergence of a regional hegemonic power as well as the continuation of its presence in that region to preserve and promote its hegemonic position in the post-Cold War era.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

On the whole, it has been emphasized that qualitative research is researcher centric. In this approach, the researcher determines the importance, value and originality of the materials. The researcher also decides on the documents and selects a sample of text for the analysis (Burnham, Lutz, Grand, & Layton-Henry, 2008). In this work, the content analysis is used due to the nature of research and its related information. Content analysis has also been introduced as an appropriate method to study Political Science and its branches of this discipline (Babbie, 2007). This method takes place every time somebody reads or listens, summarizes and then interprets a content of body (Burnham *et al.*, 2008, p. 259). To

analyze related data, this work applies a form of qualitative content analysis, which can be used to analyze documents of a qualitative study (Merriam, 1989). It is important to note that, although documents are generally used as supplemental information, there is a view that states, “qualitative researchers are turning to documents as their primary sources of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 57). The usage of documentary material has been regarded in part similar to interviews or observations. From this view, there are various voices that have surrounded a researcher in the library, and these voices are represented as books, articles and so on (Merriam, 1989).

Public or archival documents have been used for analyzing the data in this work, which are adopted from official sources of the United States such as the White House web site. The documents deal with written evidence termed as ‘published evidence’ (Gillham, 2000). Here, the recorded official speeches of the U.S. president, George W. Bush, and some of his cabinet members in his first term, such as the Vice President (name), Secretary of State (name), and Secretary of Defense (name), were used as the main data for the analysis. The speeches also comprise some official reports which are related to the period between 2001 and 2004. These documents include the National Energy Policy (NEP) report that indicates the United States strategy about energy, and National Security Strategy (NSS) that presents the annual exercise which updates the U.S. geopolitical code (Flint, 2006). These types of documents are categorized as

primary sources in this study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Besides, secondary data are also included in the research data. Therefore, the presidential speeches and other official documents prepared by or under the supervision of the President are regarded as primary resources. These documents form the the main foundation of data in this paper.

With regard to the collection of speeches as the main documents for this study, it should be noted that the geopolitical codes of a state are strongly linked to presidential speeches. These speeches reflect those beliefs and geopolitical assumptions that construct the foundation of geopolitical codes. These assumptions, in fact, define national interests, threats and responses, as well as adequate justifications of the state. The foreign policy also relies on these geopolitical assumptions, and thus, they are seen as a close relation between the President and the events. In the United States, however, this relation is more notable because the President is the ‘Commander in Chief’. Internationally, the President is a subject who has a particular world view and agenda. The President interprets events and characterizes them for specific political goals (Flint, Adduci, Chen, & Chi, 2009). This paper also focuses on the State of the Union address, which is “an annual act of political theatre that demands the President claim that the U.S. is ‘strong’ or ‘healthy’.” It is a geopolitical act that “places the President at the center of the foreign policy agenda”. Apparently, this type of speech represents a global benevolent picture from

the United States. This geopolitical act is also applied to express representations in order to justify America’s actions (Flint *et al.*, 2009, p. 605).

To obtain the main objective of this study, secondary sources are also used for the source of information (McNabb, 2005). These sources, such as relevant books and articles, comprise previous works which have been studied by other researchers and serve as supplementary documents (Merriam, 1989). Finally, through coding all the data and defining specific themes, the process of analyzing the data in this work is done based on the content analysis method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In responding to the main question of this study, the analysis on the content of selected data, such as speeches, official documents, and previous studies, has led to a focus on some specific themes that help the researcher identify the important geopolitical assumptions which could form the U.S. geopolitical code in relation to the Persian Gulf oil and the Iraq War. The arguments and discussions stress the oil experience of the Bush administration, the oil shortage and the severe threat to the United States industry, the dependency on foreign oil, the Persian Gulf oil as the U.S. vital interests, influence of neoconservatives’ thoughts, the September 11 attacks, Iraq as a serious threat, pre-emptive war as a response to the threat, and oil control of the Persian Gulf as a necessity for the continuation of America’s hegemonic position.

*The Bush Administration and Oil Industry  
— Assumptions and Experiences*

Midland in the West Texas is a flat, dry and dusty place, which has been seen as the capital of the Permian Basin. It was the place where George W. Bush and his parents returned to in 1950. Despite the seemingly dreary landscape, a sea of oil swims beneath it. Notably, in 1950s, it comprised nearly 20 percent of America's oil production. Following his father's path to business and for other political reasons, Bush Jr. returned to Midland in 1975. It coincided with the quadrupling of oil prices due to the Yom Kippur War<sup>1</sup> and the establishment of OPEC in 1973 and 1974 (Zelizer, 2010). In Midland, he experienced an entry-level position in the oil industry and the funds raised via his family connections helped form his oil exploration company (Greenstein, 2003). He noted, "In 1979, I started a small energy exploration company in Midland. I raised money, mostly from the East Coast, to finance drilling in low-risk, low-return oil and gas wells" (Bush, G.W., 2010, p. 30). He also continued his oil company business instead of political activities; however, he was not as successful as his father, Bush Sr. Furthermore, it coincided with a recession in the oil industry around 1982. Subsequently, his oil company, Arbusto, was merged with Spectrum 7, which was a big oil exploration company in 1984 (Marquez, 2007). Although he ultimately left the oil business in 1990, supporting the oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge became an important issue that he

campaigning for in his 2000 presidential election campaign. He declared in his first presidential debate on October 3, 2000, that

*"I was a small oil person for a while in west Texas... You bet I want to open up a small part of Alaska. When that field is online, it will produce one million barrels a day." With reference to the import of one million barrels from Iraq, he commented, "I would rather that a million come from our own hemisphere, have it come from our own country as opposed to Saddam Hussein".*

(Bush, G.W., 2000)

Later, when George W. Bush became the United States President and in response to the influence from domestic oil producers, he nominated some famous politicians for important positions in his administration. Dick Cheney was appointed as the Vice President in 1993 when President Clinton took the Office. Cheney was CEO of Halliburton Company, which is one of the biggest oil-services companies in the world to date. Prior to that, when Cheney was the Defense Secretary in the Bush Senior administration, Halliburton won a five-year contract to provide logistics for the United States Army, and it won defense contracts worth over \$2.2 billion when Bush Jr. was inaugurated. Moreover, Cheney resigned from Halliburton Company in 2000 while he still received about \$1 million annually from the company (Burman, 2007). Another



Bush Cabinet member, Donald Rumsfeld, who was the Defense Secretary, held different positions especially in the Reagan administration; the most important of them was related to his mission as Reagan's Special Envoy to Iraq. There is a view that his aim was to increase Iraq's oil exports through Jordan by using an oil pipeline, which could supply cheaper oil for the U.S. and Israel (Wogan, 2004). Furthermore, from this position, he managed to gain valuable experiences, particularly concerning Iraq and the Middle East oil. In this context, others to be considered were Donald Evans as the Commerce Secretary, who was the owner of Colorado Oil Company, Gen. Thomas White, the Secretary of the Army who was from Enron Energy, and Robert Jordan, the Saudi Arabia ambassador, who was a member of Baker Botts and active in oil and defense affairs (Pfeiffer, 2004).

### **The United States Oil Industry and the Severe Oil and Gas Shortage**

Indeed, although there is this view that the intention of toppling Saddam Hussein in Iraq had been formed at the beginning of the Bush administration in early 2001 (Clark, 2005), at that time, however, preventing terrorism or controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) after the September 11, 2001 attacks was not yet a top priority of Bush foreign policy. There was a severe oil and gas shortage, especially in some parts of the United States, which began months before Bush Jr. became the President (Klare, 2004b). At that time, the nation was suffering from

increases in gasoline prices, shortage of natural gas in some regions, and rolling blackouts in California. This difficult situation continued until George W. Bush entered the White House in early 2001. In response to this crisis, the National Energy Policy Development Group (NEPDG) was created by the President, led by Vice President Dick Cheney. This group was appointed to analyze the difficult situation concerning America's energy and plan suitable solutions for that problem (Klare, 2004c).

### **The United States Oil Industry — National Energy Policy and Increasing Dependency on Foreign Oil**

According to the National Energy Policy (NEP) report, this body was established by the President in his second week in the office, an act which in the first instance reveals the significance of oil and natural gas to the Bush administration's view. This report concludes that the United States faced the most serious crisis of energy shortages in 2001 – a situation which had its beginnings during the oil embargoes in the 1970s. The nation's energy crisis was a result of a basic imbalance between supply and demand. This posits that even increasing levels of energy production at the same rate which occurred during the previous decade could not meet the increasing levels of consumption during this energy crisis. This imbalance could have undermined the U.S. economy, the Americans' standard of living, as well as the U.S. national security.

On the other hand, estimates indicated that by 2020, the U.S. oil and natural gas consumption would increase by 33 and 50 percent, respectively, and the existing growth rate for oil production would improve the gap between demand and supply. Statistically, following the report, the United States daily oil consumption would grow by over 6 million barrels between 2000 and 2020. Moreover, according to previous growth patterns of production, it would face a decline of about 1.5 million barrels per day. It stressed that by 2020, only 30 percent of America's oil needs would be supplied from the U.S. oil production, and thus, the U.S. would have to import nearly two out of every three barrels of oil (NEP, 2001)<sup>2</sup>.

This document explicitly looks at other regions outside the U.S. territories which could supply America's energy needs, although it considers five specific national goals as follows: "America must modernize conservation, modernize our energy infrastructure, increase energy supplies, accelerate the protection and improvement of the environment, and increase our nation's energy security" (NEP, 2001, p. ix).

As Klare (2004c) correctly noted, instead of stressing conservation and the rapid expansion of renewable energy sources as the main challenges, the report reflects increasing U.S. dependence on oil, and because U.S. oil production was declining, any rise in the U.S. oil consumption would increase its dependence on imported petroleum. The report (NEP, 2001) represents the importance of energy

position in the Bush administration, and it explicitly refers to the U.S. dependence on oil as a serious long-term challenge, as well as stresses a close linkage between U.S. economic security and its trading partners, on the one hand, and the global oil market development, on the other (p. 1-11).

*The Persian Gulf Oil as the United States Vital Interests — A Geopolitical Assumption*

NEP refers to the role of the Middle East in terms of "where supply is geographically concentrated" in determining the oil price. In this respect, it declares that among those regions which supply the world oil, "Central and South America account for 9 percent", Africa and North America, 7 and 5 percent, respectively, and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 5 percent. As stated in the report, the rest of Asia and Western Europe, account for 4 and 2 percent, respectively.

Among all regions, the Middle East dominates almost "two-thirds of world proven reserves" and this explains how this region has a huge dominant impact over the price of oil, which is a vital matter for the U.S. and West (p. 1-12). Just consider what had been said in 1999 by Dick Cheney, when he was Chairman of Halliburton Company. He declared that, although there are many regions around the world that provide great oil opportunities, only the Middle East region "is still where the prize ultimately lies" and this is due to its huge reservoirs and its lowest cost (Cheney, 1999).

In this respect, according to the United States Department of Energy, the Persian Gulf region supplied about 12.6 per cent of U.S. demands and about 23.8 percent of its oil imports in 2000. Moreover, about 21 and 75 percent of West Europe and Japan, respectively, were also supplied via the Persian Gulf (EIA, 2002b). It is interesting to note that at that time, like the previous administrations<sup>3</sup>, the Persian Gulf region was identified as the U.S. vital interests. Hence, from this point of view, access to that region was one of the key considerations in the U.S. foreign policy at the time (O'Tuathail, 2003).

The Bush administration in this report (NEP, 2001) stressed that by 2020, between 54 and 67 percent of the world's oil demands would be supplied by the oil producers in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, dependency of the global economy on the supply of oil from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members would also be increased. Consequently, "this region will remain vital to U.S. interests". It also stressed that "the Gulf will be a primary focus of U.S. international energy policy" (pp. 8-4 & 8-5).

Therefore, since the Second World War, as a principal element in defining the geopolitical code, the Persian Gulf region has repeatedly been positioned as the United States vital interests, and this has been a persistent geopolitical assumption among the U.S. political leaders. Along with some other different factors, the issue of energy security with focus on the energy resources of the Persian Gulf has obviously been the

most significant element determining this area as a vital interest, which prescribes the United States military presence in the Persian Gulf.

Apparently, this was explicitly emphasized by President Carter, known as the Carter Doctrine. According to Klare (2006), the doctrine has been continued through to the Bush administration so that any threat to these interests will always be answered by military action. However, to define geopolitical codes, it is necessary to specify and define the potential threats to America's interests, the adequate response to threats and the justification to choose that response (Flint & Taylor, 2007). The Bush administration also required an adequate opportunity to act, which was, of course, provided by the September 11 attacks in 2001.

#### *The Neoconservatives and Redefining the United States Geopolitical Code*

As O'Loughlin noted, it was a reality that although the United States desired to reorder the geopolitical condition of the post-Cold War world, it had not yet consistently accepted a certain geopolitical code (O'Loughlin, 2000). It was an attempt to redefine its geopolitical code with regard to keeping its position as the sole remaining superpower from the Cold War era, and reordering the new geopolitical world order. It started with the geopolitical transition period immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the policy was pursued even more actively with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The

most remarkable attempt to redefine a new geopolitical code was between 1991 and 2000 with Bush Senior's pronouncement of the New World Order. The 1991 Gulf War was based on this idea to construct a new geopolitical world order, but was not pursued by the Clinton Administration (Flint *et al.*, 2009).

In 1993, not long after Bill Clinton became the President, the neoconservatives began a number of censures against his administration. Within this period, two geopolitical discourses emerged as variants of neo-conservatism and became influential visions of twenty-first century geopolitics. One of them was Samuel P. Huntington's 'Clash of Civilization,' which portrayed 'the West' against 'the Rest' so that others would try to challenge the West's primacy. A new cross-civilizational concept was introduced, namely, the 'Confucian-Islamic connection' that would be a network of 'weapon states' and provide a dangerous 'otherness' to 'the West'. That new enemy would threaten the 'Western interests, values and power'. Huntington, as a neoconservative, extended a vision of a 'culture war' between 'the West' and the 'Otherness', which was a 'standard neoconservative preconception'. In addition, the second neoconservative geopolitical discourse related to the 'Statement of Principles' announced by a group called Project for a New American Century (PNAC). Reasserting the American supremacy in world affairs was the main goal of PNAC, on which basis the United States would become sufficiently strong and would need greater levels of defense spending (O'Tuathail, 2006, pp. 120-123).

Later, especially after the September 11 attacks, both these geopolitical discourses influenced the U.S. action. The Middle East remarkably became the geographical context to practice these discourses. Al Qaeda, a terrorist group which had its roots in Saudi Arabia, designed an unprecedented attack on the West's world symbols while claiming its purpose was to protect the Muslim world's interests against the West (Bin Laden, 2002).

It is also important to note the particular importance of PNAC to the Middle East region, where the 'Statement of Principles' emphasized the vital role of the U.S. in maintaining peace and security in the Middle East. Furthermore, history has also shown that along with the survival of Israel, energy resources of the Persian Gulf had always been America's most vital interest in the Middle East. More interesting is that, PNAC was organized by neoconservatives, some of whom were nominated by Bush Jr. in his administration, namely, Dick Cheney (Vice President), Donald Rumsfeld (Defense Secretary), Paul Wolfowitz (Rumsfeld deputy), as well as Jeb Bush and Lewis Libby (Cheney's Chiefs of Staff). Conservative views were clearly demonstrated, especially after September 11, in the framework of the National Security Strategy document (NSS-2002), as well as in decisions made concerning the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is noticeable also that overthrowing Saddam Hussein was one of the greatest causes of neoconservatives in the late 1990s (O'Tuathail, 2006). It was on January 26, 1998, when some neoconservatives, such

as Elliot Abrams, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, wrote a letter to President Clinton, urging the United States administration to act decisively (Abrams *et al.*, 1998). As noted by O'Tuathail (2006), after the September 11 attacks, the worldview of neoconservatives was not only changed but also strengthened, in which they applied more aggressive policies to pursue their agenda. It started with the "preparations for the public relations campaign to justify the invasion of Iraq." In this respect, "the campaign was launched with the publication of new National Security strategy in September 2002" (O'Tuathail, 2006, p. 127).

Before that, on September 20, 2001, a letter was written to George W. Bush through PNAC and signed by some neocons, supporting the necessary military action in Afghanistan to remove Saddam from power. The signatories to this letter, namely, William Kristol, Jeffrey Bergner, Francis Fukuyama and Geoffrey Bell, emphasized that, "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power" (PNAC, 2001). It clearly demonstrated removing Saddam from power as a previously determined project as well as influencing the neoconservative assumptions about the Bush administration, especially about Iraq.

*The United States Geopolitical Code and the 11/9 Attacks — A Unique Opportunity*

The September 11 terrorist attacks, 2001, indeed provided an opportunity for the Bush administration to reconstruct the United States geopolitical code, and based on these unprecedented events, the 'War on Terrorism' introduced what scholars knew as a geopolitical code. It had its roots in the NSS-2000, which was the foundation of the "Bush Doctrine. In addition, NSS was actually an annual exercise that updated the U.S. geopolitical code (Flint, 2006). Obviously, the immediate U.S. response to the September 11 attacks was 'War in Afghanistan'. It took place on October 7, 2001, against the terrorist training camps of al Qaeda and the military camps of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (G. W. Bush, 2001), and effectively introduced the Bush Doctrine and War on Terrorism.

According to NSS, what became known as the Bush Doctrine, the identified geopolitical threat "contained an apparent vagueness, but was able to become fixed on particular countries quite easily" (Flint, 2006, p. 72). This document emphasized that, "the United States of America is fighting a war against global reach." Based on this document, the enemy was not a person or a political regime; it was also not a religion or ideology, but the enemy was "terrorism" (NSS, 2002, p. 5). Placing terrorism in a global context enabled activity at different times and in specific geographical regions. It was indeed seen as a combination of different paradigms, namely, 'noblesse oblige' and 'eagle triumphant'

paradigms, which were the results of Global War on terror rhetoric. This helped to form a militaristic foreign policy for democratization and development, on the one hand, and a ‘world of regions’ paradigm, on the other, for the U.S. response and responsibility against terrorists in specific geographical regions. From this view, the U.S. code was grounded with an emphasis on specific countries, although the agenda was global (Flint *et al.*, 2009). This kind of orientation in Bush’s geopolitical assumptions had portrayed an “axis of evil” with an emphasis on specific regions, which included Iran, North Korea, and Iraq. President Bush declared in his state of the union address in 2002 that, “states like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil.” For him, “these regimes pose a grave and growing danger” ( Bush, G. W., 2002).

Regarding these geopolitical assumptions, terrorism, state supporters of terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction were identified as threats, which were elements of America’s geopolitical code. Moreover, the pre-emptive strike was identified as a response to an identified threat in some specific countries, which was clearly aimed against Iraq. Based on this view, justifications were provided for these decisions and actions, some of which were considered opposites of freedom, global order of prosperity and civilization (Flint, 2006). According to the Bush administration, Iraq was a regime that had already used “poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens - leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead

children” and it was “a regime that had something to hide from the civilized world” (G. W. Bush, 2002). What is important is that, all the three countries, namely, North Korea, Iran and Iraq, were accused of proliferating WMD and were considered the opposites of freedom and civilization. However, among the three mentioned countries, why only Iraq was selected for invasion, while even, according to Bahgat (2003), “fifteen out of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers carried Saudi passports”(p. 448).

### **Iraq — A Threat to Interests**

The importance of energy resources in the Persian Gulf region has been discussed above, not least as it ensures the free flow of oil towards the industrial world as vital interests for the United States of America. In this respect, however, what was the role of Iraq among these interests?

Firstly, at that time, Iraq, with about 112 billion barrels of oil, possessed the second largest proven crude oil reserves in the world. It contained about 11 percent of the global total, while, according to a report of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) 2003, only 17 out of 80 oil fields had been developed, which concentrated around Kirkuk in the north and Rumaila in the south of Iraq. This country also had significant proven natural gas reserves, in which almost all were undeveloped (CRS, 2003). At that time, Iraq contained about 110 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of natural gas or about 20 percent of the world total (EIA, 2002a). Furthermore, according to the annual report of the Organization of the

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 2001, among the Middle Eastern producers, Iraq possessed the second largest proven oil reserves after Saudi Arabia. It covered more than 16 percent of the total Middle East proven oil reserves. Based on this report, the proven natural gas in Iraq also contained more than 4 percent of the Middle East total natural gas reserves in 2001 (OPEC, 2001). In the same year, oil exports from Iraq were about 2 million barrels per day, representing 12 percent of total oil exportation from the Persian Gulf, making Iraq the third oil exporter after Saudi Arabia and Iran, and also equal with Kuwait (EIA, 2002b). More importantly, there is the view that Iraq was capable to explore and exploit many additional oil fields due to its vast oil reservoirs; therefore, it had the capability to become an oil producer on a par with Saudi Arabia in the future. For this reason, it was called the second Saudi Arabia (Morse, 2004).

Secondly, it became more important when Iraq was considered along with the two other important Middle Eastern oil producers, namely, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In 2001, Saudi Arabia, as the world's largest oil exporter, held the leading position in the world's proven oil reserves with more than 25 per cent of the total and about 3.5 percent of global proven natural gas reserves (OPEC, 2001). It also produced about 44 percent of total Persian Gulf oil output (EIA, 2002b), and was the most important oil supplier to the United States after Canada in 2000, accounting for some 14 percent of U.S. total oil imports (NEP, 2001).

In this respect, Kuwait possessed about 10 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and about 0.8 percent of the world's proven natural gas (OPEC, 2001). On the other hand, Saddam Hussein, however, had proven that he was a potential threat for two of Iraq's neighboring countries, namely, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They were two regional friends of the U.S. and it was vital to the U.S. interests in the region to secure their stability. The invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the greed of Saddam<sup>4</sup> for oil fields of the Persian Gulf countries, especially Kuwait, as an old desire had made him a certain threat to the Persian Gulf region and the flow of oil to the West. In President Bush Jr.'s statement during his speech in a Union address in January 2003, he clearly declared:

*“Our Nation and the world must learn the lessons of the Korean Peninsula and not allow an even greater threat to rise up in Iraq. A brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression, with ties to terrorism, with great potential wealth, will not be permitted to dominate a vital region and threaten the United States”*

(G. W. Bush, 2003b).

Despite the lack of direct reference to oil in most of his important speeches concerning Iraq and terrorism, Bush introduced directly and explicitly Saddam's government as a threat in the Union address, and deliberately alleged that Saddam was a threat greater than North Korea. For him,

Saddam was a dictator, and thus, posed a potential threat to other countries, in particular, the Iraq's neighboring states. In this respect, "precluding hostile domination of critical areas" such as "the Middle East and Southwest Asia" had also been considered as one of the objectives of the United States Armed Forces, as mentioned in the Quadrennial Defense Review Report of the United States Department of Defense (QDRR, 2001) .

Bush Jr. also explicitly referred to Iraqi oil as a great potential wealth. This was similar to the previous U.S. presidents, especially after the Second World War, in which he emphasized the Persian Gulf as a vital region for the United States. Based on his view, Saddam's domination over this region would translate as a peril to the U.S. vital interests, and thus, threaten the U.S. national security. Dick Cheney also stated clearly in his statement as Vice President in the Bush administration on August 25, 2002, "The whole range of weapons of mass destruction then would rest in the hands of a dictator... Armed with an arsenal of these weapons of terror and seat at a top ten percent of the world's oil reserves, Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East, take control of great portion of the world's energy supplies directly threaten America's friends throughout the region and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail" (Cheney, 2002). Indeed, Saddam could not be a threat to the U.S. interests or to the status quo in the region if Iraq did not have the central geographical

situation among the world's oil supplies (Morse, 2004). The threat could be supposed when Saddam was potentially capable of threatening the U.S. allies, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

It was apparent that by dominating Iraq, Saddam would threaten three key oil producers and reserves in the world, countries which were exporting about 68 percent of the Persian Gulf oil exports. These were three oil countries with common borders, and because Iraq had always faced geopolitical limitation to access the high seas through the Persian Gulf, there was always the possibility of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (and even Iran, given what happened from 1980 to 1988). Therefore, Iraq could be a serious potential threat to the United States and on the basis of the Bush Doctrine and neoconservative thought, Iraq as a 'rogue state' required an adequate response, which was defined as the 'pre-emptive attack'.

### **The Pre-emptive Action — A Response to Threat**

Bush already announced in his state of the Union address in 2002 that, "all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our Nation's security...I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer" (G. W. Bush, 2002). This geopolitical assumption was also reflected in the National Security Strategy (NSS) through the framework of pre-emptive action. This document stressed the U.S. "right of self-defense by acting



pre-emptively” (NSS, 2002, p. 6). It simply emphasized striking before America’s enemies strike first (Flint, 2006). At that time, although the Containment policy that was the U.S. geopolitical code during the Cold War era had been changed to War on Terrorism, in both times, using military force to protect U.S. vital interests was considered as adequate response. In this regard, just as the Carter Doctrine determined military action in response to the Soviet expansion towards the Persian Gulf, the Bush Doctrine selected Iraq as a rogue state and pre-emptive action was prescribed as a response to prevent domination of a dictator over the oil fields in the Persian Gulf.

As a result and apart from different representations of the U.S. geopolitical code, such as spreading freedom and democracy as values to justify war against Iraq, war as a response to protect a vital interest in the Persian Gulf region could be considered a fact. As Flint (2006) noted, “if the calculations for war can be traced to material interest, such as access to oil, governments must emphasize values or ideas in justifying their foreign policy, especially when it involves invading a country rather than defending one’s own” (p. 101). This geopolitical fact of protecting the Persian Gulf energy resources as the U.S. vital interest along with other geopolitical reasons such as the Greater Middle East Project (Guney & Gokcan, 2010; Naji, 2004) was what could be existed behind the U.S. foreign policy or using military action against Iraq. This policy was justified through justifications such as promotion of

democracy and protection of freedom as the U.S. values. From this viewpoint, it was a ‘resource war’ – a war for natural resources which has always been a critical motive (Le Billon, 2004), whether because of acquiring important raw materials for domestic needs, or for controlling vital resources in a competitive world environment. In fact, accessing global resources, in particular oil, has always been seen as a battleground. Apparently, the twenty-first century will be the same as the twentieth century and one that appears to be the century of oil too (O’Loughlin & Wusten, 1993).

Tracing the reasons for al Qaeda’s September 11 attacks, it is also important to note that Osama bin Laden in his ‘Letter to America’ noted, “You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices... This theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world” (Bin Laden, 2002). On the other side and one year later, protecting this ‘wealth’ was also stressed by President Bush to justify the war against Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003 (G. W. Bush, 2003b). Therefore, there was a strong linkage between the U.S. geopolitical code and the Persian Gulf oil as America’s vital interests, such that along with other security reasons, this could influence the U.S. leader’s geopolitical assumptions in determining the U.S. geopolitical code, and ultimately the orientation of U.S. foreign policy toward the invasion of Iraq. Needless to say, this was the reason Iraq was selected for invasion, as clearly evident in the statement by the Deputy of U.S. Defense Department, Wolfowitz on May 31, 2003,

“Look, the primary difference – to put it a little too simply - between North Korea and Iraq is that we had virtually no economic options with Iraq because the country floats on a sea of oil”<sup>6</sup> (Wolfowitz, 2003).

### **Oil Control for Hegemonic Goals**

With reference to the offensive realism theoretical approach, the invasion of America in Iraq in 2003 and consequently its military presence in the Persian Gulf could be interpreted as America’s attempts to prevent emerging regional hegemonies and promote its own hegemonic position in the world. From the perspective of geopolitics of oil in the world, this can be seen as a strategic decision to control the largest basin of oil in the world. Thus, this is also a means of controlling other great powers, in particular those states which are potential regional hegemonic states such as China. This perspective is reminiscent of “the global oil spigot” for gaining an efficient rule over the global economy (Harvey, 2003) and exerting leverage over industrial rivals (Mercille, 2010). Indeed, it stresses that the control of oil has always been defined as “the centre of gravity of U.S. economic hegemony” (Bromley, 2006).

America’s desire to continue in its highest position, which had remained from the Cold War era, was clearly seen in Bush’s speeches and the NSS-2002. However, it had been stated as a necessary step to protect the American values as well as promoting these values across the world. Expansion of freedom, democracy and peace throughout the countries especially amongst, as Bush

said, the uncivilized world had been defined as a significant mission and responsibility for the United States. Bush further said that, “America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our [American] most basic beliefs” (G. W. Bush, 2004). In this respect, the National Security Strategy of the U.S. stressed freedom as “the non-negotiable demand of human dignity,” that the U.S. assumed the responsibility of leading the expansion of it and its benefits across the world as a great mission (NSS, 2002).

From this perspective, invading Iraq was also to promote democracy as the American value in Iraq and the Middle East. For Bush, a free Iraq in the Middle East would mean “a watershed event in the global democratic revolution,” and indeed, Iraq could be regarded as “a model for the broader Middle East” (Bush, G. W., 2003a; 2003; 2004a). Simultaneously, terrorism was defined as a threat to the American values and the civilized world, which was under the leadership of the United States. In this respect, all countries which supported terrorism would be considered as a threat as well. These threats were specified as the ‘axis of evil’ (G. W. Bush, 2002), the ‘rogue states’ (NSS, 2002), the ‘outlaw regimes’ (G. W. Bush, 2003b), and the ‘dangerous regimes’ (Bush, G. W., 2004b). Iraq was also defined as a state that was trying to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and was allegedly a supporter of terrorist groups.

These justifications facilitated the U.S. action against Iraq as well as its military

presence in the Persian Gulf region. In this respect, two significant objectives could be reached through the Iraq War, which were in conformity with the U.S. geopolitical code: first, a regime change that was done to remove a regional threat to the U.S. rich oil friendly countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and second, by using these justifications, the United States would be able to continue its military presence in this area and consequently control the largest oil reservoir in the world. By controlling this region, the U.S. would control the oil flows to the industrial countries, and thus, control the global economy. Finally, it could be resulted in controlling other potential regional hegemonic states as well as preventing the emergence of new regional hegemony while promoting its own hegemonic position globally.

## CONCLUSION

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. leaders found an opportunity to redefine the U.S. geopolitical code as a Global War on Terror. This global geopolitical code relied on those geopolitical assumptions that would pursue the U.S. global hegemony in particular after the Cold War geopolitical order. With regard to this geopolitical code and through observing the U.S. foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf, in particular the Iraq War 2003, this research suggests two important issues. First, the importance of the Persian Gulf oil as a vital interest for the U.S. and the removal of Saddam from his power were

two imperative geopolitical assumptions that influenced the Bush administration.

Second, amongst the three states claimed as the 'axis of evil' by Bush, Iraq was selected as the target for the U.S. pre-emptive war. It was done because Iraq possessed a huge extendable amount of oil reserves and its oil was necessary for the industrial world. In addition, history had also shown that the Iraqi government could be a potential threat to neighboring states, in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which were regional allies of the United States. More importantly, the Iraqi oil, along with that from the two mentioned countries, constituted about 68% of the Persian Gulf total exports. Hence, from this view, Iraq could threaten significant amounts of the Persian Gulf oil exports. In the Bush Doctrine, Iraq was introduced as a threat, and thus, the pre-emptive action was defined as a response with the expansion of freedom and democracy being the justifications for the action. From this perspective, therefore, it formed a strong link between protecting the Persian Gulf oil as a crucial element for the U.S. national security and defining the Iraqi government as a certain threat to oil fields of the region and a supporter of terrorism as well. Finally, the Bush Doctrine and Bush's speeches emphasized the importance of expanding the American values and defending them across the world as a global mission for the United States. It was a justification for going to war abroad such as in Iraq.

Furthermore, it was considered as a global responsibility to prevent terrorist attacks on the civilized world and to promote democracy in the Middle East. However, it clearly revealed the U.S. attempt to keep and promote its own hegemonic position, as well as deter other great powers from becoming regional hegemonic states, and this conforms to the tenets of the offensive realism theory. Tracing the Bush Doctrine and his presidential speeches, there was clearly a strong linkage between preserving the U.S. hegemonic position and promoting the American values around the world. In this respect, to preserve its hegemony, the U.S. had to continue its global presence and protect its values. Obviously, adopting the U.S. culture and ideology by other states would reinforce U.S. hegemonic position and consequently prevent the emergence of other potential regional hegemonic powers. In addition, the U.S. military intervention in Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power would stop Iraqi hegemonic ambitions. As Bush (2003b) and Cheney (2002) noted, this would prevent the Iraqi regime from dominating the entire Middle East.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Yom Kippur War which took place between October 6 and October 25, 1973, was fought between Israel and a coalition of some Arab countries, led by Egypt and Syria. It began when forces of the coalition crossed ceasefire lines and entered the Sinai Desert and Golan Heights, which had been occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War in 1967. This conflict also created serious tensions between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet

Union, and led to a near-confrontation between them. That war was also called the Ramadan War, or the Fourth Arab-Israel War. For more information see (Dunstan, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the U.S. Department of Energy in 'International Energy Outlook 2002' with reference to the United States as the largest consumer of oil in the world, for more than one-quarter of total world demand had predicted that the primary consumption of oil in America would increase by 1.5 percent annually from 1999 to 2020. Moreover, that oil share in the U.S. energy mix would increase slightly from 39.4 percent in 1999 to 39.7 percent in 2020, totaling 26.7 million barrels per day (EIA, 2002a).

<sup>3</sup> All administrations from President Truman to President Clinton, as well as documents such as 'A National Security Strategy for A New Century - 1998' and 'A National Security Strategy for A New Century - 1999' and 'A National Security Strategy for A Global Age - 2000', which had been projected before the beginning of Bush's presidency emphasized the importance of the Persian Gulf region for the United States to ensure the security of oil flow toward the U.S. and its allies, namely, West Europe and Japan. For more information, see (NSS, 1998, 1999, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> From Saddam's view, Kuwait was part of the Ottoman province, which was under the authority of Basra, and thus, Kuwait belonged to Iraq. However, Saddam's main concern was oil, and from his view, Kuwait owed Iraq because Iraq had fought against Iran for all the Arabs. He also claimed that Kuwait's oil must be used for all the Arabs. For more information, see (Long, 2004) and (Flint, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Saddam had been introduced as a threat to the security, peace and oil fields of the region as mentioned through Bush Senior in his state of the Union address on January 29, 1991 (G. H. W. Bush, 1991) and Clinton's speech in 1988 (G. W. Bush, 2010, p. 227).

<sup>6</sup> This statement from Wolfowitz has been noted in different sources with minor changes. These sources cite that, “the most important difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically, we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil.” See, for instance, (Le Billon, 2004) and (Wright, 2003).

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