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The Role of Ideology in the U.S. Foreign Policy of George W. Bush in Iraq and Barack H. Obama in Syria

By

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Dedication Page

To my loving father Sami and dear uncle Samer, my guardian angels

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The Role of Ideology in the U.S. Foreign Policy of George W. Bush in Iraq and Barack H. Obama in Syria

Maya Sami el Gharib

ABSTRACT

Iraq and Syria have been at the heart of US Middle East foreign policy for some time. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 were followed by a fundamental shift in US foreign policy that emanated from the neo-conservative powers in the administration of George W. Bush. The 'Bush Doctrine' abandoned the prevailing realism of US foreign policy at the time and instituted a muscular Wilsonian approach that valued big-stick diplomacy and unilateral action to safeguard US interests and maintain its unipolar prominence on the world stage, while advocating the merits of spreading democracy and American values in the region. Barack H. Obama inherited the chaotic aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and a region destabilized by popular uprisings against autocratic regimes, the most violent of which was in Syria. US foreign policy under Obama diverged significantly from that of his predecessor and shunned ideology in favor of a Jeffersonian approach. In an integration of both realism and idealism, the Obama administration believes democratic reform of authoritarian regimes cannot be imposed extrinsically by overwhelming force, and US military might is not a suitable instrument of regime change. Obama's foreign policy in Syria is derived from a soft-realist approach that values caution, restraint and multilateral consensus and upholds US strategic interests over all other considerations.

Keywords: US Foreign Policy, George W. Bush, Barack H. Obama, Iraq, Syria, Realism, Idealism, Neo-conservatism, Bush Doctrine, Soft-realist Foreign Policy, Authoritarianism, Arab Spring, Muscular Wilsonianism, Jacksonians, Jeffersonians.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis:

Two nations in the Middle East, Iraq and Syria, have been the focus of two recent US administrations to varying degrees and during over-lapping time periods. This thesis tackles the impact of the neoconservative ideology of the George W. Bush administration and the soft realist approach of Barack H. Obama on US policy in Iraq and Syria, respectively. In so doing, this thesis examines the impact of ideology on US foreign policy in the Middle East. The research uses the comparative approach to explain the effect of different ideologies on US Middle East policy.

1.2   US Interests in the Middle East:

The Middle East region has always been of crucial importance to the United States. Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977-1981, once described the Middle East as that portion of the world "which stretches along the shores of the Indian Ocean, with fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us, threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political chaos could well be filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries" (Hashemi, 2012, p. 38-9). Naturally, most nations in the Middle East differ from the US on many levels including cultural, political, and social. The US has demonstrated time and again that it is ready to engage directly in the Middle East when

its strategic interests or security needs are at stake. Historically, the two pivotal interests have been the protection of oil supply and the security of its ally Israel. An 'OPEC share of world crude oil reserves' survey conducted in 2013, shows that the bulk of oil reserves, around 66%, come from OPEC member countries from the Middle East. Saudi Arabia constitutes 22% of reserves while Iraq accounts for around 16% of reserves (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC], 2015)[1]. Israel, the closest and most strategic political ally of the US in the Middle East, has always relied on US support whether directly in terms of financial funding for its military and provision of the latest and most advanced weapon systems or indirectly in diplomatic support on the world stage.

With these key interests in mind, a brief overview will follow detailing the recent history and key developments in US foreign policy in Iraq and Syria and how the Bush and Obama administrations have differed in their approach.

1.3   Iraq in US Foreign Policy:

Bush's doctrine while waging a war on Iraq in 2003 has been described as "Wilsonianism with teeth" (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 1). Wilsonianism is an ideological perspective on foreign policy derived from the paradigm of idealism. It is attributed to US President Woodrow Wilson and advocates the promotion of democracy and capitalism in order to promote world peace. In a sense, Bush's doctrine added a militaristic element - the "teeth" - to the ideological strand of Wilsonianism to provide the doctrine with power and enforceability. To initially understand the difference

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[1] http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm

between Iraq and Syria, one has to go back to the question of when did the governments of Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad become a priority for the US to address? How do these countries and their geopolitical roles in the region influence US national interests, shape its foreign policy, and affect its allies? The idea of ousting Saddam Hussein was initiated before the terrorist attacks on US soil in 2001. According to Russell A. Burgos, "the Bush administration's construction of Iraq after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was not a *sui generis*, but was derived from an understanding of how to the solve the Iraq problem that had already been embedded in American foreign policy discourse" (Burgos, 2008, p. 224). Regime change discourse among members of the administration preceded the events of 9/11.

The terrorist attacks that occurred on 9/11 and the US administration's need to respond to those attacks are indispensable, but not sufficient, in explaining the 2003 invasion of Iraq. To better understand the US stance against Saddam Hussein we need to go back to the presidency and administration of George H.W. Bush and the Persian Gulf War. Operation Desert Storm, which began in August of 1990 and continued to February of 1991, was a war waged against Saddam's army in Kuwait and Iraq and by US-led coalition forces from thirty-four nations and resulted in the defeat of the Iraqi army and the ending of its occupation of Kuwait. President George H.W. Bush, at the conclusion of military action, praised Operation Desert Storm as a strategic and moral victory. Nonetheless, Bush Sr. was met by criticism back home for not completing the task of removing Saddam and his Baath regime from power (Maddow, 2013). This was despite the fact that the sovereignty of Kuwait was restored and the regional balance of power had swung back in favor of US interests. There was apparently no military plan in place to oust Saddam Hussein from power. Collin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff and the highest ranking officer in the US Armed Forces during Desert Storm, clearly states that this was not an objective of the operation. "In none of the meetings I attended was dismembering Iraq, conquering Baghdad or changing the Iraqi form of government ever seriously considered", states Powell (Burgos, 2008, p. 237-8). Dick Cheney, the secretary of defense in the George H.W. administration, fully supported the president's restraint policy in the early 1990s. That political stance from Cheney, however, would not last for long. The conservatives within the administration and the intellectuals outside the government did not stop criticizing the outcome of Desert Storm and lobbied for the demise of Saddam's regime. Following President Bill Clinton's election, the proponents of regime change redirected the substantive meaning of the "Iraq threat". The deterrence and containment strategy that the Clinton administration had been practicing at the time were being attacked as a viable policy (Burgos, 2008, p. 222). Increasingly the situation in Iraq came to be seen as a "Saddam problem". In 1998, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz, working under Secretary of Defense Cheney, was one of the main advocates of regime change in Iraq, publicly urging for Saddam's removal. With the George W. Bush administration at the helm in 2000, hawks from both the Democrat and Republican parties, the principal political parties in the US, were expressing support for severe measures aimed at rolling back the rogue regime in Iraq and possibly removing Saddam from power (Burgos, 2008, p. 246). What served to push the US towards a second war in Iraq was the coming together of several factors and circumstances. President Bush and his team of neoconservative hardliners in power along with a Republican majority in the US House of Congress, bolstered by the perception of success in the war in Afghanistan which was relatively inexpensive, along with the elevated support of the Bush administration among an

American public angered and fearful following the civilian deaths on 9/11, all of this made it easier to authorize the use of military power to remove Saddam under the banner of neutralizing a threat in the Middle East region and removing Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD)– in the name of democracy and implementing the 'War on Terror'. The next section addresses Obama's foreign policy towards Syria's conflict and Bashar's regime, including the fluctuating relationship between Syria and Washington since the Reagan administration until present day.

1.4 Syria in US Foreign Policy:

Syria has always played a pivotal role in Washington's Middle East calculations. Syria serves as a geopolitical interest to the US because it also shares borders with Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and Israel, thus placing it in a critical position that can thwart or expand US strategic goals. US policy towards Syria has profoundly been affected by a realist approach that was largely visible and popular since the presidency of Ronald Reagan and continues to the present day. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Syria's role became more problematic for Washington. The US accused Syria of harboring and training terrorists and insurgents that relocated to Iraq. In October 2008, a few days before the US presidential elections, military helicopters were dispatched to attack the known locations in Syria of individuals that the Bush administration believed were aiding Iraqi insurgents (Sadat & Jones, 2009).

Within a couple of years following Obama's presidential election, Washington's foreign policy in Syria was given an opportunity to evolve and gradually improve with cautious yet valid diplomacy. The downward spiral of deterioration begun in 2004

following US ratification of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that stipulated the departure of the Syrian Army from Lebanon and followed by the implication of the Syrian regime in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri by the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon in 2005 (Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, & Zahar, 2012). This deterioration continued for almost five years. However, by 2009, there was a turning of a new page with the Assad regime. First signs of this kind of effort emerged with the reassignment of the US Ambassador Robert Ford to Damascus after a five year absence following Hariri's assassination. Many US congressional members of both parties and even representatives from the executive branch frequently met with Syrian officials. In effect, both countries were determined to re-launch US-Syria relations. In the middle of 2010, the US started to differentiate between the regime of Bashar al-Assad and the then Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, referring to Gaddafi as a mad man, even stating that Bashar was a different leader than his late father President Hafez al-Assad, hoping that the son might be a reformer (Goodenough, 2011). When popular protests in Syria started surfacing in the early spring of 2011, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton referred to Assad as a "reformer", a president that will answer the demands of his people for change. Prospects for an improvement in the relationship between the West and Syria comprising diplomatic engagement, and economic opportunities to follow, were on the brink of solidifying. However, this political endeavor was about to take a turn for the worse when the Arab Spring started. In the summer of 2011, the US denounced Bashar's oppressive crackdowns of the popular protests that resulted in many casualties, asking him to step down from the presidency.

In July and August 2013, the alleged use by the Syrian army of chemical weapons against civilians forced Obama to declare that this was a dangerous violation

that had crossed a "red line" previously established by his administration. This declaration, however, in reality had no clear implications or outlined consequences. Obama threatened retaliation with limited air strikes to punish Bashar's regime for causing severe harm to the Syrian civilians and prevent the Syrian army from further use of chemical weapons. By the end of August 2013, Obama did start planning for a limited strike option, however, this was put on hold due to Obama seeking pending approval and support from US Congress. It may be argued that the Obama administration was not eager to engage militarily in Syria and floated the idea of air strikes to save face because its "red line" was crossed and the approval from US Congress was a political maneuver to avoid military action. An alternative to military action presented itself shortly thereafter in the form of a deal arrived at during talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in which the Syrian regime would hand over all chemical weapons in their possession to the US for destruction. Effectively, the unintended consequences of this deal have been the easing of international pressure on Assad and continued inaction on the part of the US administration and providing only verbal support to the moderate opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) (Rothkopf, 2014). The civil unrest in Syria consequently escalated, turning into a sectarian war. The turbulence of this conflict has crossed over the shared borders with its neighbors. The threat of ISIS (or ISIL - Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has emerged as a powerful destructive force in the region. As of early December 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has claimed the killing of 202,354 people since popular protests in Syria erupted in March 2011. Of this total number 63,074 were civilians, among the causalities 10,377 were children and the death toll in this turbulent nation continues to rise (Al-Arabiya News, 2014). According to the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 3,725,685 million (last updated on January 26, 2015) Syrian refugees have been registered as displaced throughout Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq since the start of Syria's civil war. This figure does not take into account the unrecorded numbers of Syrian civilians who fled from the conflict and those whose exact whereabouts are unknown (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015). The three questions in the following segment help in explaining the argument of this Thesis and aid in differentiating between the hardline neoconservative foreign policy adopted by Bush in his invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the "soft" realist behavior of Obama's foreign policy, loosely referred to as a doctrine, regarding President Bashar al-Assad and Syria.

1.5 Research Questions:

To what degree was the policy of the Bush administration in the lead-up to Iraq's invasion in 2003 driven by neoconservative ideology? The discussion in the subsequent chapters will demonstrate that neoconservatives believe in big-stick diplomacy and perceive a return to a multipolar balance-of-power as a hindrance to American national interests and a threat to its security and the international order. The Bush administration, under the influence of neoconservative ideology, formed a doctrine that had four major tenets and all were influential in building the rationale for invading Iraq. The first, referred to as bandwagoning, is the belief that once Iraq is invaded and Saddam Hussein is ousted other regional players would be threatened by the US military show of force, surrender and jump on the US 'bandwagon'. When given the opportunity for democratization from the US, all the people will aspire to and eventually support

democracy. Second, and perhaps most controversial element of the Bush Doctrine, is the policy of preemption and the use of military force rather than diplomatic deterrence when dealing with rogue states. Thirdly, the Bush doctrine values a unipolar international system and unilateralism. Finally, the promotion of democracy and the democratic-peace theory which posits that democracies are unlikely to engage in hostile actions against other democracies and a Middle East with more democratic regimes would provide for peace and stability in this vital region with important US interests including oil and security of Israel. Mearsheimer (2005) characterizes the Bush Doctrine as "Wilsonianism with teeth" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 199). It in many ways echoes President Theodore Roosevelt's mantra of "walk softly and carry a big stick".

Can Obama's foreign policy with respect to Syria be simply defined as 'soft realism'? To what extent is he a Jeffersonian president and does his foreign policy move away from a set of ideologies? In a speech in 2006, and prior to the announcement of his presidential candidacy, Obama stated that he favors "a strategy no longer driven by ideology and politics but one that is based on a realistic assessment of the sobering facts on the ground and our interests in the region" (Lizza, 2011, para. 4). The Jeffersonian approach, which values caution and restraint, is at the root of Obama's soft-realist foreign policy when it comes to the question of military intervention in Syria. The underlying rhetoric in many of Obama's speeches concerning the Arab uprisings is based on one of the views of idealism, where right is preferred over might when compromises have to be made (Atlas, 2012). Obama's policy since his first term has been to integrate the principles of both realism and idealism.

How does Obama's foreign policy in Syria today differ from the Bush Doctrine? There are some similarities between the scenario in Syria today and that in Iraq

preceding the US invasion in 2003, namely that an authoritarian regime is committing violence against its own people, including the use of chemical weapons, and there is a possibility that US allies and regional interests may be at stake. The foreign policy of Obama, however, lies in stark contrast to that of his predecessor. The Bush Doctrine believed that it can deliver democracy and freedom to the people of Iraq by extrinsic force whereas Obama's administration believes that only intrinsic efforts including the cooperation of governments and the people can lead to political reform and stable change and this is lacking in Syria. While an argument can be made for intervention in Syria on a humanitarian basis, to relieve the suffering of innocent civilians who are caught in the crossfire between the warring factions, Obama has made it clear that the era of unilateral action on the part of the United States has ended and that the US will only intervene in humanitarian endeavors as part of a multinational coalition. The exception to this rule is any situation in which core US interests are threatened and that is not the case in Syria. While the Bush administration was willing to make an example of its use of force in Iraq to bandwagon the regional players toward democracy – while imposing a global 'muscular' Wilsonian stance – the Jeffersonian approach of Obama views the American model of democratic governance as an organic product of US history and unique American experience and not a template that can readily be duplicated elsewhere. The differences between the role played by the US in Iraq versus in Syria is not only a result of differences in timing, mineral wealth or strategic interests, but rather is the manifestation of a profound difference in foreign policy, ideology, and in how each administration views the world and the leadership role the US can and should play.

1.6 Methodology:

Foreign policy can be assessed from many different perspectives. Starting at the inception, one can examine the cultural and historical elements woven into the fabric of a nation and its governance system and follow those threads as they merge to form a particular foreign policy view. Alternatively, an appraisal may focus on how well foreign policy is implemented and effectively translated from theory into action by a given administration as well as examining outcomes and end results. Equally as valid would be an evaluation based on the manner in which these policies are received and reciprocated by the world community.

As outlined in the research questions above, this thesis explains the differences in the foreign policy responses between the Bush and Obama administrations in Iraq and Syria respectively. The thesis focuses on the role played by ideology, the shaping of each administration's response to threat perceptions in Iraq and Syria. As the thesis later discusses, the ideological differences between the Bush and Obama administrations are substantial, mainly because of the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001 and their aftermath. Consequently, ideology serves as an explanatory variable of the variations in the Bush and Obama's foreign policy responses to crises in Iraq and Syria.

A comparative analysis of the role of ideology in US foreign policy under Presidents Bush and Obama will be made by utilizing the events in Iraq in 2003 and Syria since 2011 as case studies. These were selected due to the fact that they share many similarities in the circumstances on the ground prior to any US intervention – authoritarian regimes committing violence against their own people with increased risks for US allies and regional interests – and yet have been addressed in a very different

manner by each administration. This difference in approach and method of US intervention stems primarily from the presence of a specific neoconservative ideology in the US administration under President Bush that is absent from that of President Obama.

US foreign policy on Iraq and Syria are reviewed and discussed based on a comparative analysis and a qualitative research. Documentation and information are gathered from secondary sources. The collected information is from journals, literature from political analysts, databases, publications and journalists from prominent news agents, such as *Foreign Policy, The Washington Post, The National, The Atlantic, The New Yorker*, and *Council on Foreign Relations*. The interviews are with President Barack H. Obama and former US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton**.** A comparative research approach is utilized to demonstrate how ideological changes across the last two US administrations help explain US foreign policy differences vis-à-vis Iraq and Syria.

1.7 Map of the Thesis:

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The introduction sets the stage for the later discussion with a historical background of the Bush and Obama administration in respect to their foreign policy towards Iraq and Syria. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature that addresses concepts and facts critical for understanding their ideology and policy differences. Chapter three discusses the role of ideology in George W. Bush's foreign policy and the impact of the Bush Doctrine in the lead-up to and throughout the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and how it affected the rest of the Middle East. It also addresses the question if the aim of the war was to promote democracy or to

secure oil fields in Iraq? Chapter four examines Obama's soft-realist policy in Syria and how it affects the Middle East. Is there an Obama Doctrine or even an ideological framework in his policy? It also includes a discussion about policy options in Syria and an analysis as to why it chooses not to militarily and directly intervene and remove Bashar's regime. Chapter five concludes with a summary of the pertinent points and an analysis of the gathered data regarding the ideology and foreign policy of Bush and Obama.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

Chapter two is divided into two parts; the first part reviews the relevant literature regarding Bush's ideological foreign policy towards Saddam Hussein and Iraq. The literature about George W. Bush's administration allows the reader to understand the shift from a US realist foreign policy that had been applied by various US administrations since the Cold War. The first part also offers different perspectives in understanding how the decision to invade Iraq came to be and the neoconservative motives behind Saddam's removal and democracy promotion in Iraq. According to political scholars examined in this thesis, the idea of regime change had already existed before the 9/11 terrorists attacks. After those attacks, realism was marginalized in order to pursue neoconservative US foreign policy in the Middle East, starting with Iraq, through a unilateral decision to utilize big-stick diplomacy to promote democracy and bolster the US 'War on Terror'. The second portion of the chapter will examine the Obama's administration stance towards Syria's regime and civil war. The authors try to expose and comprehend the reasons why Obama seems to be caught in a situation where maneuvers and decisions are limited, while some of them also prescribe ways in which Obama can contain the conflict in Syria. Further examined factors pertaining to the thesis topic include the role of ideology in Bush's 'muscular' Wilsonian idealist Iraq

strategy in comparison to Obama's soft-realist Syria policy that can be understood from a Jeffersonian approach.

2.2 Bush's Foreign Policy Towards Saddam and Iraq:

The literature review begins with Bush's neoconservative foreign policy towards Saddam's authoritarian regime and its implication in Iraq. The first section of this chapter is about the role of ideology in Bush's policy in the lead-up to and throughout Iraq's war explained from the perspectives of International Relations (IR) theories by academic analysts of IR paradigms that include Walt, Jervis and Snyder. Important perspectives from various authors are also explored. Mearsheimer discusses the failure of the Bush administration in assessing pragmatic factors after Iraq's invasion and the ineffectiveness of US bandwagoning. Hinnebusch explores factors contributing to the decision-making process of invading Iraq, while simultaneously buttressing the theory of US Empire in explaining US objectives regarding Iraq's war. Burgos asserts that "regime change hawks" had already promoted the idea of regime change in Iraq well before George W. became president in January 2001. Schmidt and Williams discuss how realists failed in highlighting American values in their US foreign policy choices. Fawcett, claims that's Iraq's war has largely influenced the rise of the Arab Uprisings. Gause argues against those who perceive that the US invaded Iraq for control of its oil and energy. The following part will explain these authors' assertions in more detail.

Stephen M. Walt (1998, p. 30) suggests that, "no single approach can capture all the complexity of contemporary world politics". While different political theories can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each other, even calling out for subsequent

adjustments, diverse contemporary schools of thought should be accepted and promoted. It was the realist theoretical approach in international affairs that took center stage throughout the Cold War. "Classical" realists, such as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebhur, believed that it was inherent for states just like human beings to try to dominate others, while modern realists find the underlying sources are "opportunities and temptations presented by the international environment" (Jervis, 2003, p. 317). The offense-defense theory on the other end of realism's spectrum would argue that when defense is easier than offense, states will eventually form balancing alliances and position themselves with a defensive rather than an offensive military power. We can witness this kind of approach today between Russia and China on one hand and the US, France and Britain on the other with the former member states vetoing UN Security Council sanctions condemning President Bashar al Assad's regime.

Robert L. Jervis offers a different perspective that can be comprehended from a tangible angle about Bush's Iraq policy that other scholars might strongly dissent to, since realists and neoconservatives were publicly competing for their influence and power in US foreign policy debate in the early 2000s. Jervis contends that "Offensive Realism perhaps provides the best explanation for what the US is doing because it sees states as always wanting more power in order to try to gain more security for an uncertain future" (Jervis, 2003, p. 316). Bush had stated in a speech in October 2002: 'We will not live in fear', (Jervis, 2003, p. 317). The psychological feeling of uncertainty had profoundly affected the US public after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The US president and his administration at the time, through the savvy use of media, cleverly built a strong political case for the US to take action. They convinced the public that inaction would consequently cause more harm to the US. Bush's administration was

finally able to forgo Clinton's policy of containment and deterrence. In effect, they advocated for the use of brute force and a policy of preemptive war, because they believed that it can create the effective objective of ousting Saddam. As Jervis (2003) stated, Bush and his colleagues did not concur with Stephen Waltz's argument that nuclear proliferation will spread deterrence and render nuclear stability or would moderate behavior of 'evil' states. Jervis claims that, the Bush administration perceived coercion and deterrence in particular as ineffective policies when dealing with tyrants and terrorists (Jervis, 2003). Therefore, because the Bush administration strived for American security, global stability, the reconstruction of international politics and the spread of democracy in nations with authoritarian regimes hostile to the US, preemptive war was the clear course of action for the US in Iraq.

Jack Snyder makes a legitimate point about IR theories today. He argues that idealism, realism and liberalism take on the role of "intellectual window dressing", and they are often insufficient in explaining how policymaking and public debate work in the political world (Snyder, 2004, p. 54). According to Snyder (2004), realism was successful in explaining US imperial behavior: when its power rises it will employ its military to enhance its control of region. Nonetheless, events that followed 9/11 undermined one of realism's main views which predicts, that weak states will align with each other to protect themselves from a stronger state, thus reshuffling the balance of power. Similarly, liberalism may explain why the Bush administration sought to rally for democratic values in Iraq, yet it simultaneously ignored the vital role of international institutions which are equally important in liberalism's agenda.

Similarly, John Mearsheimer (2005) underscores how the Bush administration did not take into account the assessment of realistic factors on the grounds and the effect

it would have on Middle East nations that strongly opposed US intervention in Iraq. There was a military strategic plan for Iraq but a blueprint detailing how the process of democratization would proceed was hardly existent. This discrepancy undermines those among the neoconservatives who would proclaim that Wilsonian idealism and a desire to bring freedom to Iraq's people was an important consideration for the Bush administration.

Mearsheimer (2004) explains that the neocons believed in big-stick diplomacy: military power that facilitates unilateral decisions. Iran, North Korea, and other potential troublemakers in the Arab World would be threatened by the US military show of force, surrender and jump on the US bandwagon, ultimately proving bandwagoning's "domino theory". The Bush's administration faith in the doctrine of 'revolution in military affair s' (RMA), made them believe that their strategy would be efficient and effective in a relatively short amount of time. However, he claims that RMA is ineffective in fighting back an insurgency and the US does not have much success in nation-building especially in a nation with barely any experience in democracy (Mearsheimer, 2005).

Raymond Hinnebusch (2007) is in search of an IR theory that can explain what drove the US to invade Iraq since the realist perspective falls short. He argues that Western-style ideology and multiple dynamics in congruence with each other led to the invasion of Iraq. It was a combination of Israel, oil resources and American exceptionalism. Still, he cautions that "these elements would be more convincing if they were subsumed within a broader theoretical perspective" (Hinnebusch, 2007, p. 212). He suggests that theories of empire must be underlined and the idea of US Empire must be reinstated into political discourse. He continues to argue that the problem was not derived from the threat of using WMD against the US; the real threat came from

Saddam's regime. Hinnebusch (2007) discusses US foreign policy in terms of its interest in Iraq's oil and the reasons for its hegemony over the oil market. The Iraq war was about the US situating its global position as an empire. Hinnebusch's US Empire theory holds credibility in explaining a few factors yet cannot explain the behavior of the Bush administration following the invasion. In his second presidential term, George W. Bush downsized the role of American exceptionalism in the region because of the escalating costs and insurgency in Iraq and was further dissuaded in promoting democracy in the Middle East when Hamas won a major parliamentary share in the 2006 Palestinian elections.

Russel A. Burgos (2008) advocates that the ouster of Saddam Hussein was rooted in US foreign policy well before the presidency of George W. Bush, and did not result from the idiosyncratic decision-making process of the neoconservatives. He argues that changes in political discourse "result from a dynamic interaction between competing ideas and material events in the international system" (Burgos, 2008, p. 223) and not from individuals and this can help us understand how the neoconservatives chose the path of military intervention. The "regime change hawks", as Burgos labels them, (Burgos, 2008, p. 226), had the 'Ideapolitik' of regime change in full effect by the early 2000s. Throughout the 1990s, the problem went from being Iraq to Saddam and the only effective solution was regime change. The 'Iraq Liberation Act of 1998' can further justify that the removal of Saddam was well established before Bush had entered the White House in 2000.

Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams (2008) argue that the neocons and realists were in a war of debates centered over whether or not it was in America's interests to invade Iraq. The former criticized and tried to weaken realism's balance-of-

power, while praising their theory of bandwagoning (Schmidt & Williams, 2008). The neoconservatives claimed they were rightly speaking of and protecting American interests and values globally. Neo-conservatives were successful in building a vast social support for the war in the lead-up to Iraq's invasion. Realists were not as popular in conveying their message to the public, because they failed to emphasize American values in their foreign policy preferences. Ever since the outcome of the Iraq war, neo-conservatism has gradually waned in US foreign policy. The realists have gained back their momentum, because balance-of-power and protection of interests are what the US values the most in the Middle East. Realists, on the other hand, do not portray themselves as the agents of spreading democracy and American exceptionalism. In concurrence with Schmidt and Williams (2008), realists need to work harder on explaining their policy choices and its conceivable outcome.

Louise Fawcett (2013) claims that there is a link between the downfall of Saddam Hussein and subsequent uprisings in the Arab spring. She explains how the Iraq War has had a significant impact on the domestic, regional and international level. She gives an example of how the jihadi or resistance movements that were developed in response to the war later redeployed in Syria and Iraq. In effect, this is triggering a new regional balance of power in the Middle East, further dividing the interests of the Sunni Gulf monarchies and the Shiites of Iran and its allies. Fawcett (2013) claims that the Iraq war is not credited for being the only agent of instigating change in the Arab uprisings yet it did act as a 'catalyst'. This may be true to a certain extent, however, the Iraq war was a foreign intervention and it differs from events in Arab Spring nations in that change originated there primarily from national movements in a bottom-up direction. And in the case of Iraq, the Iraqi people did not plead for US intervention, while the

natives of some nations that underwent (or are undergoing) revolutions were requesting international aid.

Gregory Gause, III (2010) argues against critics of Iraq's war that claim that 9/11 only served as a pretext for the US invasion of Iraq. He objects to those who claim that the true motives of the invasion were American imperial expansion and control of Iraq's oil reserves and empowerment of US energy corporations while at the same time securing Israel's dominance. He argues that the post-war failure in locating WMDs counters critics' aforementioned assertions. The US did not sign any substantial oil development contracts after the war. Only a Chinese company was able to guarantee a contract with a new Iraqi oil field by the end of 2008. Gause (2010) also defends the Bush Doctrine against those who argue that plans to democratize Iraq were an afterthought and an attempt to evade criticism of pre-war intelligence asserting the presence of Iraqi WMD. The neocons defend their position by stating that plans to reform the Middle East were part of US policy since the lead-up to the war. The war's target was to remove Saddam's regime in expectation of finding a link between WMD and Al-Qaeda. However, as the march to the war intensified the Bush administration became more aware of the advantage of spreading democracy in the Middle East, and Saddam's removal and democratic reformation in Iraq would be ideal for the region and US interests. Like Robert Jervis (2003), Gause (2010) states that psychological factors after the 9/11 attacks, greatly influenced the decision-making process in US foreign policy towards Iraq. Bush administration officials strongly adhered to their convictions that Saddam was a terminal threat that must be destroyed. Bush and Cheney believed WMD existed in Iraq and that Saddam could use them against the US and therefore decision to go to war was out of sincere concern for the safety of the US. This belief

may be naïve in Gause's opinion and should have warranted more reflection and verification; however this conviction justifies their action (Gause, III, 2010, p. 238-9). While Hinnebusch (2007) alleged that the neoconservatives were very persistent in implementing and expanding the US Empire strategy for its own self-interests. Nonetheless, Gause does not state the costly drawbacks of the US preemptive war in Iraq. Even if probabilities of terrorism were small, the costs of war were not redeemable and until today there is no effective exit strategy in place.

These above-mentioned authors cover many aspects of Bush's neoconservative agenda throughout his presidential era. Many scholars try to dissect the origin of the Iraq threat and its transformation into a Saddam threat. They emphasize the role of realism and idealism and how the former's containment and deterrence strategy was weakened in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Ideology played a prominent role in Bush's foreign strategy, especially in his first presidential term. The reasons for the US war on Iraq are still debated among political analysts. While these authors describe the decision-making process leading up to the US invasion in 2003, they also contribute perspectives in regards to what went wrong with Bush's Iraq policy and how it eventually affected the US foreign policy of his successor that is examined in the next portion of this chapter.

2.3 Obama's 'Right Over Might' Policy in Syria:

The second part of this paper begins by discussing the build-up to Obama's foreign policy towards the Middle East and Syria that initially started to develop in his first presidential election campaign in 2007. Obama was once criticized by Hillary Clinton, his rival during the 2008 Democratic Primaries, for his lack of experience in

dealing with dangerous regimes. Nonetheless, he gradually improved his foreign policy skills. Some contend that his strategy in Syria is inactive. Others argue the he is being reasonable in dealing with these problems from a distance because he is cautious of implementing ideology in his foreign policy, partially due to his successor's failed extrinsic endeavor in the Middle East. There are also those who believe he is practicing idealism and soft-realism simultaneously. Some of the authors in this section date back to Bush's presidency and US invasion of Iraq. It is important to review the 'muscular' Wilsonian agenda of Bush because of its substantial impact on Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East. Articles that are studied in this section can help us understand the geopolitical structure of Syria in the Middle East region and how it affects Washington.

2.3.1 Obama the 'Hybrid' President:

In this part of the section Lizza and Mead discuss Obama's reservations about adopting ideology and his preference for what may be described as a Jeffersonian soft-realist tactic in protecting US strategic interests in the Middle East region.

Ryan Lizza (2011) asserts that no president is either a realist or idealist since American values and interest are intertwined with each other. Obama's reluctance to intervene in Syria is rooted in his conviction to steer the US away from the Middle East and diplomatically engage with nations across the Pacific. Nonetheless, American foreign policy has many interests at stake in the Middle East. And since the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab uprisings, the US seems unable but to get pulled back into the region's conflicts whether for the protection of US interests or humanitarian commitments. Many considered Obama's political platform as the antithesis of the Bush Doctrine. Lizza (2011) points out that Obama felt that he must essentially move away

from ideology after Bush's "Freedom Agenda" had tainted US foreign policy in the Middle East. Obama's critics and even those close to him feel the US, being a superpower, cannot lead from behind. It has to be assertive and powerful in its foreign policy strategies.

Walter Russell Mead (2010) explains US foreign policy since the 1980s from four schools of thought which are: Alexander Hamilton, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. He claims that Jeffersonians are often caught in a dichotomy between realism's limited global policy based on economic advances and interests and Wilsonianism's foreign policy of promoting democracy and humanitarian intervention. Jeffersonians are often criticized by many as being submissive. However, its preference for disarmament agreements and stability over unilateral decisions and military buildups has acted as a check against "imperial overstretch by ensuring that America's ends are proportionate to its means" (Mead, 2010, para. 34). The Jeffersonian approach and its tenets can help us understand why Obama has chosen not to militarily intervene in Syria. The likes of President Jimmy Carter's good-willed Jeffersonian approach that became plagued with failure in the 1980s mainly due to his tactic towards the Iranian Revolution must be dodged, especially in the present day after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

2.3.2 US Policy Towards Syria from 2008-2009:

Kaplan (2008) claimed that when Bashar al-Assad came into power problems were already present and he had not much choice but to suppress government criticism and protests. He suggested at one point (before the popular protests had erupted) for the establishment of a Syrian National Security Council to take on the role of an authorized judicial body that can oversee that change applies smoothly under unity. To a degree that

he almost romanticizes the notion that individuals from Syria's ruling elite and the Baath regime will welcome pluralism and accountability while working with the opposition movements and the US (Kaplan, 2008). As Kaplan (2008) mentioned in his article, this scenario has taken place before and did not result in any success due to the regime's brutal crackdown on 'Damascus Spring' forums and potential reform initiatives back in 2000-2001. While it may be credible to posit that the secular nature of the Baath regime could be helpful in enabling democracy and maintaining sufficient coexistence among Syria's divided society, Assad himself has undermined this attempt at reform by excluding all but a few close family members and allies in holding governmental and administrative positions.

Mir H. Sadat and Daniel B. Jones (2009) are mentioned because their contributions help readers perceive how the relationship between the US and Syria has experienced variations in the recent past. The basis of their political engagement can be understood best by starting at the period described as the 'Reign of the Realists' when Ronald Reagan was US President in the 1980s. Sadat and Jones argue that even though Syria has been on the US State Department list of sponsors of terrorism since 1979, "it was realistic to overlook the authoritarian nature of the Syrian regime when it was the in U.S. national interest to seek its help" (Sadat & Jones, 2009, p. 95). The Bush administration's approach towards their perceived idea of a rogue state, such as Syria, was "opposition through isolation" or as more convincingly coined by former US ambassador to the UAE, "isolation and monologue" (Sadat & Jones, 2009, p. 96). On the other hand, the US could have engaged Syria with dialogue and diplomacy instead of opting for the neocon's exploitation of the democratic-peace theory. Sadat and Jones proposed for Obama's administration to take a risk in supporting a moderate-realist

policy despite the fact that such a policy might pose a challenge to US national interests. In effect, this might encourage Syria to democratize or at least aid the US by allowing the Syrian regime to act as a mediator in the region. This kind of policy can also serve Syria by easing some of the sanctions against Assad's regime and allowing the US to help Syria in securing its membership in the WTO (Sadat & Jones, 2009).

2.3.3 US Policy Towards Syria from 2011-Present Day:

Michael Singh (2011) contends that through US policy of encouraging reform and liberalization, the US administration should take on the responsibility of trying to establish stable alliances with the local populations and not just the authoritarian regimes. Singh (2011) acknowledges it was the US that planted the seeds of the current turmoil that eventually gave rise to anti-Americanism. Yet at the same time he agrees with Kenneth Wollack's assertion that economic development and democratic governance have a great impact on each other. There are other examples of countries that have political repression, corruption and economic stagnation, and when these factors are all found in one place they tend to negatively influence and affect each other (Singh, 2011) In Syria, even when there was a shift to a neoliberal economy, 5% of the population owned the lucrative business ventures, while more than 30% were unemployed and between 11% and 30% were below the poverty level (Dahi & Munif, 2012, p. 328). Singh (2011) suggests that the US must help expand political reform by advocating for political debate and discussion in its true form and by working hard in rolling back extremist groups that might try to take advantage of frail novel situations. Since democracy does not automatically solve corruption, the US must provide for technical and financial assistance so that Syria can build institutions that can give rise to and consolidate democracy. He also claims that the US should review its economic

approach towards the region and in a way this has already started, via the 'Millennium Challenge Corporation'.

Amos N. Guiora (2012) questions the principles and application of humanitarian and military intervention, since there is no international law with normative or architectural standard. He compares between the two distinct responses of the US administration regarding the conflicts in Libya and Syria. He claims that the US somehow vindicates its inaction in the Syrian conflict, because the Syrian opposition lacks organization like that of the Libyan protesters. Nonetheless, in 2011 the similarities of both conflicts far outweighed the differences. Guiora (2012) does make a valid point in that there are no clear criteria that justify intervention and it is not necessarily needed to influence foreign policy in the first place.

One of the most interesting articles comparing the policies of the Bush and Obama administration and the impact of US foreign policy on the Arab Spring is 'US Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring: Balancing Values and Interests' by Pierre M Atlas. He asserts that since America's founding there has always been a struggle in US foreign policy between two diplomatic philosophies: realism and idealism. And as the promise of a prosperous Arab Spring spirals into a darker Arab winter, realism and idealism will shape, intertwine and occasionally clash with each other in US political discourse and policy. Atlas (2012) argues that Russia's UN Security Council veto on condemning Bashar is due to Putin's pure realist policy approach towards his ally Bashar Al-Assad. If the Syrian status quo remains the same that would be to Russia's advantage, since the regime is a major consumer of Russian weaponry and the latter wants to retain its naval base in Tartus. Obama on the other hand is described as a "hybrid president" and a "progressive pragmatist" (Atlas, 2012, p. 360). Therefore the challenge of successful

statesmanship would require outlining the constituents of both power and morality and achieve a balance between them with continuous vigilance and calculation. Realism and idealism would be rooted in an Obama Doctrine that would act in opposite of the Bush Doctrine that empowered 'muscular' Wilsonianism together with neoconservative ideology. By adopting this approach, however, rarely would the Obama Doctrine apply to any Arab nation presently (with the exception of Libya) because its stipulations for authorizing US humanitarian military intervention are too demanding. However, Obama's inconsistent and soft-realist policy in the Middle East can hardly be described as a doctrine. Nonetheless, having a doctrine may not be as imperative as having a well-balanced assertive policy.

The authors of 'Beyond The Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World' Brynen et al. (2012), mention that after the US invaded Iraq and condemned the Syrian regime (the US had supported and signed UN Security Council Resolution 1559), Assad severely tightened the noose of government control in anticipation of a possible US military intervention to follow as it had in Iraq. Between the clamp downs on Damascus Spring initiatives and forums, Bashar pursued greater control measures replacing old-guard officials of the Baath regime with close family members and allies (Brynen et al, 2012, p. 42-43). Bashar's political and military appointees, including the governing elites, took control of old and new economic monopolies and this added to the frustration of the exhausted Syrian public, particularly in the wake of the uprisings that had already begun in Tunisia and Egypt. According to Hinnebusch (2007), the Syrian president wanted to distance himself from his father's Baath regime in order to demonstrate to the US the regime's gradual attempts at reform. He gradually introduced economic reform in a substantive manner, such as privatization

of specific divisions and foreign investment opportunities (Brynen et al., 2012, p. 44). Dahi and Munif (2012) would argue that economic liberalization did take place in a subtle qualitative manner instead of being a quantitative change that hardly made any substantive progress in the lives of the rest of Syria's population. Assad's regime no longer showed signs of tolerating political reform, however, and they arrested and punished the last remnant of the Damascus Spring.

Omar S. Dahi and Yasser Munif (2012), claim that the development of liberal democracies in the West is because they were able to export their surplus of violence to the Arab societies during the colonial era. In effect, those on the receiving end are not just revolting against their authoritarian regimes but also against Western dependency. Although this argument is rather general in its explanation, they further contend that authoritarian regimes have accepted Western dissemination of violence in exchange for Western tolerance to their autocratic rule and maintenance of US interests in the region. (Dahi & Munif, 2012).

Paul R. Williams and Colleen (Betsey) Popken (2012) review ten short-term observations about the Arab Spring. They believe that US response and support of democratic movements, rests on the foreseeable fall of the ruler, yet cautions that Washington might fall back on the traditional approach of depending on non-democratic leaders or groups. They also discuss the norm 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) adopted by the UN Security Council and its development. The use of R2P is inconsistent as we have witnessed its effectiveness in Libya but it has yet to be authorized or applied in Syria (Williams & Popken, 2012). Many have argued that 'R2P' cannot be effective without the approval of the major regional players including the Arab league especially

since the latter gained prominence in the approach to Libya's struggle. The need for 'widespread consent' weakens the fundamental purpose of R2P.

Ved P. Nanda (2012) contrasts the US policy of military intervention in Libya and the non-military intervention policy in Syria by also referring to the UN "Responsibility to Protect" norm based on a three-pillar framework for its effectiveness. The problem with R2P is that it lacks the necessary tools that are essential for its proper implementation in cases of prevention or coercion. Its lack of chronological order of the stipulated features is a weakness that allows for its inconsistent use that makes nations suspicious of its provision and use of force. Nanda asserts that the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) cannot agree with the rest of the West on the application of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), regardless of the first two frameworks of this humanitarian intervention doctrine being associated with preventive actions. The third pillar of R2P, "timely and decisive response by the international community to prevent and halt atrocity crimes" (Nanda, 2012, p. 22), needs a fundamental monitoring and assessment system, in anticipation of its measures far outweighing the mandate granted by the Security Council for the use of force.

Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Ray Takeyh discuss how Qaddafi's regime had transformed from a recognized international renegade and sponsor of terrorism into what US ambassador Gene Cretz had described, a "strategic ally" of the US, since its cooperation on matters of nonproliferation and counterterrorism (Gvosdev & Takeyh, 2012, p. 8). However, on March 11, 2011 there was a shift in US policy that became evident when 'Operation Odyssey Dawn' went into effect against Qaddafi and his government. Gvosdev and Takeyh (2012) question if America's foreign policy has entered a post-realist phase where promotion of US democratic values, at minimal costs,

precedes its national interests. "The Arab Spring could offer the United States a template for future limited interventions that could uphold American values without exacting much cost in return" (Gvosdev & Takyeh, 2012, p. 17). It seems US policy makers today are more willing to pursue small-scale military interventions instead of large-scale operations, and while the results may not be optimal they are nonetheless satisfactory. US foreign policy has deescalated since the time of George W. Bush's legacy of being an ideology strategist that favors big-stick diplomacy. Obama has sided with soft-realism in his US foreign policy approach although an intervention similar to Libya's has yet to occur anywhere else. It seems Obama's administration prefers the current balance-of-power in the Middle East, since interests might be lost and costs might exceedingly increase in the chaotic and ambiguous environment of the region.

David S. Sorenson (2013) warns of a complex and dangerous problem if the Syrian civil war were to spill over across its borders into neighboring states. America has too many interests at stake in the Middle East and Syria seems to be at the center of it all due to its shared porous borders with US allies. Like Fawcett (2013), Sorenson (2013) claims that the heart of the war is the conflict that is escalating between the Sunnis and Shiites throughout the region. Sorenson stresses that in this current volatile situation the only approach the US can adopt is containment. The US is stuck in a game of chicken with Syria. It cannot control or restrict the actions of the Syrian regime. Sorenson asserts that Al-Qaeda or its associated groups (e.g. ISIS) have a high chance of being the true beneficiaries after Assad is gone (Sorenson, 2013). Consequently, the US cannot do much except contain the problem within Syria's borders. The primary players in the conflict in Syria, whether it's the Syrian regime or violent extremists, will be hostile towards US interests and its Middle East regional allies.

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Former Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger (2012) claims that US foreign policy should not be blamed for havoc in the Middle East region, nor can it solve all the shortcomings in domestic issues and policies of nations in the area. His assertion holds true to a certain point but fails to account for the meddling perpetrated by the US in the internal affairs of some Middle East nations trying to nationalize their resources or undergo some form of democracy. Kissinger (2012) attributes that the real fight within Syria, is not so much for democracy as much as it is a political conflict between Assad's Alawites that is also supported by other Syrian minorities, and the Sunni majority. Washington is encountering a choice between strategy and governance. In effect, the political actors within the Middle East region that are willing to take part of a new world order along with the West must understand that US contribution must be calculated and met by their compatibility with American interests and values. Thus we must mesh realism and idealism together instead of placing them at opposite ends (Kissinger, 2012).

2.4 Conclusion:

This chapter examines how the efforts of Bush and Obama to deal with rogue regimes have differed. Bush sought to change the ideological structure of these regimes into democracies through extrinsic military intervention. Obama, on the other hand, chose to reduce US military force abroad and focus on US domestic issues while encouraging democracy by setting an exceptional example at home. Obama also stresses that reform should be encouraged and developed through intrinsic public movements. The Bush administration decided to engage in war without thoroughly examining evidence and possible outcomes first. The Obama administration believes that there

should be more substantial evidence, an evaluation of interests to consider, and robust multilateral consensus before US military involvement. The next two chapters will explore in further detail the comprehensive studies and comparative analysis that the mentioned authors have laid out, starting with the role of ideology in Bush's foreign policy in the lead-up to and during Iraq's war and followed by an examination of Obama's soft-realist policy in Syria.

Chapter Three

The Era of Bush's Doctrine and the US Invasion of Iraq

3.1 Introduction:

Robert L. Jervis (2003) asserts that US foreign policy during George W. Bush's era in the Middle East can best be explained as "offensive realism", because states always have the desire for power, therefore they will try to develop more security in an uncertain future. In political analysis the fundamental distinction is between coercion and brute force, each of which is further divided into two branches. Compellence and deterrence are under coercion and offense and defense are categorized within brute force. The Bush policy towards Iraq in colloquial terms is regularly described as coercive, but this is not accurate in the political sense. Jervis is correct when he claims that Bush felt that the only effective way to deal with Saddam Hussein is through brute force. This means "the ability of a state to take and hold what is wants by physically defeating the other's army" (Jervis, 2003, p. 320).

Jervis (2003) and Gause (2010) make the same point that psychology has played an important factor in the decision to invade Iraq. Inaction can lead to more danger. The possibility of uncertainty must be eliminated by taking the lead with preemptive war. Gause (2010) asserts that psychology enmeshed with foreign policy can help us comprehend why the Bush administration was determined to invade Iraq after 9/11.

When analysts were not able to locate any substantial WMD in Iraq, the US administration was quick to defend its position by referring to the period of the First Gulf War and cite Iraq's previously declared stockpiles of dangerous arms and its previous use of chemical weapons as evidence that WMD must exist but are concealed. The previous existence of WMD does not in fact provide evidence they continued to exist but psychological factors made this deduction seem plausible in the eyes of the administration. Information that would support their premise of Iraq's WMD was highly valued while evidence that contradicted their assertions was disregarded. Optimism about post-war Iraq's venture towards democracy flourished and now there was no going back to 'deterrence' partly because the Bush administration believed it was a failure in the 1990-1991 Gulf War period (Gause, 2010). Those who supported the invasion of Iraq were propelled to argue that a war against an authoritarian like Saddam Hussein with WMD was not going to be inexpensive, however costs would be minimal and the outcome would be successful. They contended that the long-term prospect of deterrence is dangerous and an uncomplicated military victory is highly conceivable; there would also be positive regional feedback after Saddam's ouster and Iraq's nation building towards democracy and stability would look ideal. Jervis argues that a psychological explanation can help us comprehend the neoconservative's perceptions of Saddam's removal since these four factors mentioned above are being linked together as multiple facets of one outcome when in fact they are independent of each other (Jervis, 2003, p. 318).

This chapter is about the role of ideology in Bush's foreign policy towards Iraq. 'Regime change hawks' demoted realism's containment and deterrence strategy and unilaterally adopted preemptive action and the use of military force in the Middle East to

halt terrorism and roll back rogue regimes. The neoconservatives' goals to implant democracy in Iraq and verify the bandwagoning theory in the Middle East ultimately proved to be unsuccessful. Chapter three is divided into six parts. The first section discusses the heated debate between the neoconservatives and the realists regarding Bush's strategy in the lead-up to Iraq's war in 2003, the second segment is about the rise of Saddam Hussein as a threat, followed by a discussion concerning the aftermath of US invasion of Iraq. The fourth part questions the neoconservatives' motivations behind Iraq's war, the fifth portion examines the impact of Iraq's war on the Arab Spring and this chapter ends with a conclusion that summarizes all the pertinent points and views.

3.2 Neoconservatives versus Realists:

In the lead-up to the war, the realists and neo-conservatives argued whether or not the US should wage a war against Saddam's regime. The neocons believed in big-stick diplomacy. The Bush doctrine claimed that military power will yield much more effective results than diplomacy, which in effect facilitates unilateral decisions. Iranians, North Koreans, Palestinians and Syrians would be threatened by the US military show of force, surrender and jump on the US bandwagon, ultimately proving the "domino theory". Mearsheimer (2005), underlines in his argument that in order to better perceive the neoconservative aspect concerning Iraq's invasion, we must comprehend their "bandwagoning" logic. In the lead-up to the war, the neoconservatives argued that the "domino theory" effect can help create friendly democracies and render states with democratic values and policies. The neocons also believed in the democratic-peace theory. Since democracies tend to associate with each other with peaceful and benign

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intentions; it was a war where the "white hats" would militarily defeat and roll back the nefarious "black hats" in order to spread democracy. In effect, this would reproduce more white hats, because democracies ensure security and stability and rarely fight with each other (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 9).

The Bush's administration faith in the 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA), made them believe that their theory would be efficient and effective in a relatively short amount of time. RMA would include, "stealth technology, air-delivered precision-guided weapons, and small but highly mobile ground forces to win quick and decisive victories" (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 2). The idea of a larger army or big battalions would work against RMA which would undermine the unilateralist decision to invade Iraq. Mearsheimer (2005) argues that RMA is incompetent in fighting back an insurgency and the US does not have much success in nation-building especially in a region with barely any experience in democracy. The neocons had wishful thoughts that once they endowed a troublesome nation like Iraq with their idealism of democracy (deriving from the paradigm of neo-conservatism, underlying the foreign strategy of the Bush administration), the rest of the Middle East and Islamic world would follow, hence the domino theory would become operative. Although there would be some bumps ahead, the end of the road would look bright. The irony was that Bush and previous US presidents did not have a problem with other Middle East authoritarian regimes that acted in complete contrast to their democratic values as long as they served US strategic interests.

In the 1980s, the US had provided Saddam with overhead satellite imagery to strike the Iranian army. This is just one example of the US exerting foreign policy based on classical realism. Interestingly, Mearsheimer (2005) argues how the father of

classical realism, Hans Morgenthau would have opposed the US war on Iraq, since the large-scale military venture in Vietnam was unsuccessful and burdensome for the US and Vietnam. He would have not at all been optimistic about the Bush Doctrine. What makes it more credible in a multiethnic and sectarian-divided nation like Iraq located in a volatile region that barely had any experience in democracy? In short, realists believe that we live in a world where states resist threat through balancing behavior rather than bandwagon: and "when one state puts its fist in another state's face, the target usually does not throw its hands in the air and surrender" (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, the most powerful political ideology is nationalism, not democracy. The Vietnamese did not fight for US idealism or communism rather for self-determination and nationalism. The Iraqi people had suffered under the hands of their despot and they to some degree needed help (at least in weakening Saddam's regime which would help recruit and empower Iraqi democratic opposition groups) but so did other countries that encountered the same kind of atrocities by their leaders, if not worse. Nonetheless, this war was initiated first and foremost for US security and self-interests and not for humanitarian intervention purposes. When bandwagoning becomes ineffective - because the US is heavily embroiled with insurgencies and an ill-prepared nation-building dilemma after the war - America's remaining adversaries presumed to become fearful of the US would nonetheless become more resilient and enhance their nuclear deterrents. Many Iraqis wanted Saddam out, but it did not necessarily mean foreign intervention at the expense of thousands of innocent lives. Iraq's war did somehow have an impact on the 'Arab Spring' movement that started in Tunis but the countries and groups that are hostile to the US did not react by immediately jumping on the US 'bandwagon', instead it made them prone to more animosity against Western intervention, and triggered nefarious

factions to grow and spread terrorism regionally. The next section looks at how Saddam Hussein became a menacing problem for Washington since the 1990s. The terrorist attacks and the substantial events that followed 9/11 supported the idea of Saddam's removal to finally materialize and develop into the ideological foreign policy of the Bush administration towards Iraq.

3.3 The Rise of the 'Saddam Threat':

Russell A. Burgos (2008) argues that the reformulation of American foreign policy that led to Iraq's invasion in 2003 had already started in the 1990s and not immediately after 9/11. In 1998, the Iraq problem was redefined as the "Saddam Problem" and regime change was seen as the most effective policy option by "second-level official(s) of sub-cabinet rank" (Burgos, 2008, p. 222) who would eventually play a critical role throughout the decision-making process of Iraq's war. Michael J. Mazarr had described 9/11 as a "policy window-a crisis event that enabled decision makers to switch policy tracks at very low cost" (Burgos, 2008, p. 224-5). According to Burgos (2008) the decision to go to war after the attacks was the culmination of a policy process that had started long before. The choice to go Iraq and depose Saddam Hussein was a preferred plan of action among major players in US foreign policy prior to George W. Bush becoming president.

The September 11 attacks had three major consequences with regards to influencing US foreign policy in the lead-up to Iraq's war. Military use would become less costly since it would be used as an effective tool in the US "Global War on Terror"; The modest cost and initial success of the war in Afghanistan made the prospects of

Iraq's war optimistic; and finally, Republican majority in congress and an increase in public support of President Bush also paved the way for the regime change hawk's decision to go to war. One scholar described the public debate of Iraq policy "a conspiracy of ideas (and) not individuals that led to the war" (Burgos, 2008, p. 226). Burgos (2008) gives alternative explanations for Iraqi regime change that political scholars have studied to help us understand US grand strategy in Iraq. Among these accounts were cognitive explanations that Gause and Jervis had also discussed as psychological explanations, which analyze "cognitive origins of foreign policy look at decision makers' biases, uses of analogies, heuristics or schemas or operations codes" (Burgos, 2008, p. 229). According to Burgos (2008), Bush can be described as a president who needed to appear resolute to the point of stubbornness; a born-again Christian whose decision was also driven by faith and instinct. He publicly loathed Saddam for trying to assassinate his father back in Kuwait in 1993. However, this alternative can only explain an individual's impact on the decision-making process instead of making an idea-centered analysis, where Saddam's removal was embedded in American foreign policy discourse long before.

The hardline neoconservatives and hawkish political officials that were in Washington throughout Bill Clinton's presidential era contended that containment and controlling Saddam in a "strategic box" severely lost its credibility and only his forceful removal from power would solve the "Iraq problem". By 1998, regime change hawks such as Richard Perle were convinced that containment was "bound to fail" against the backdrop of realists "fixation and obsession with stability" (Burgos, 2008, p. 239). By 1998, regime change had won over public debate, since the containment status quo was starting to empirically prove itself as unproductive. This drawback was even recognized

by a few Clinton administration proponents. The often labelled "Wolfowitz Plan" endorsed by neoconservatives included US support of exiled-Iraqis "democratic opposition movement". Its aim was to overthrow Saddam and the rest of the developments would follow.

Influential political rhetoric adopted by ideologues of regime change through ideational and institutional constitutions redirected US policy to an unsurmountable war. A major problem of the US's strategy of Iraq's invasion was that it was planned halfway, when there should have been a full-scale plan for government replacement and a counter strategy to stop insurgencies.

The neocons and realists were practically always in a heated debate over whether or not it was in America's interest to invade Iraq. The realists were eventually pushed aside and the conceptual framework and neoconservative vision of American foreign policy developed the 'Bush Doctrine'. This ultimately boosted the decision to invade Iraq and topple its leader in 2003. The neocons severely criticized realism's balance-of-power and instead inflated their own theory of bandwagoning. Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams (2008) claim that after the first Persian Gulf War from 1990-1991, the neoconservatives were unhappy with the outcome. They wanted the US administration to go all the way to Baghdad and remove Saddam from power. They sought to endorse a grand strategy that would "prevent the emergence of a new rival" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 195). This plan was outlined in March 1992 in a secret five-year Defense Planning Guidance paper that was leaked to the press. Paul Wolfowitz, the undersecretary of defense for policy from 1989-1993, was the principal author of the paper. The neocons had a significant preference for a hegemonic order over realism's balance-of-power order. This was also obvious in the graduation speech at

West Point in June 2002, when Bush stated that, "America has, and intends to keep military strengths beyond challenge-thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 195). This kind of attitude would profoundly differ from President Obama's speech about multilateral action and non-interventionist US foreign policy, at the West Point graduation ceremony in 2014 when he stated, "America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. The military that you have joined is, and always will be, the backbone of that leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only-or even primary-component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail. And because the costs associated with military action are so high, you should expect every civilian leader – and especially your Commander-in-Chief – to be clear about how that awesome power should be used" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014, para. 15).

The neoconservatives perceived a return to a multipolar balance-of-power as a hindrance to American national interests and a threat to its security and the international order. Four elements underlined the Bush Doctrine and delivered an influential rationale for invading Iraq. These were: bandwagoning; when given the opportunity for democratization from the US, all the people will aspire to and eventually support democracy. The most controversial element of the Bush Doctrine was the policy of preemption through the use of military force. Deterrence was assumed to be counterproductive against rogue states, because neoconservatives became unwavering in their opinion that terrorists were more than willing to die for their cause. Unilateralism dominated US foreign policy and the principal of preemption was what assured neoconservatives that they can maintain a unipolar international system. Bush's

inclination to a unilateralist behavior was already present before 9/11 when it vetoed the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Kyoto Protocol and other international agreements. Most importantly, its invasion of Iraq was a unilateralist action when it overrode the UN Security Council in regards to the UN's disagreement about the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Finally, the promotion of democracy what Mearsheimer refers to as "Wilsonianism with teeth" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 199). Neoconservatives were believed to be the respective heirs of Wilsonian liberalism that should often be instigated by force.

Realists have always been critical of US attempts to employ moralistic foreign policy crusades, in order to transform nations into what is sees best. Classical realist Hans J. Morgenthau would try endlessly to convince American foreign policy officials of the dangers in pursuing foreign policies based on universal moral principles and values, while backhanding national interests if not neglecting them altogether. Realism also underscored the significance of moral and political values however to a certain subtle degree. Classical realist Hans J. Morgenthau emphasized that moral principles should develop from political reality. To pursue a policy of universal democracy would lead to disaster because in the end "commitments would out run resources and failure would ensue" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 203). This would become the case with the Bush Doctrine. Bandwagoning in the Middle East was ineffective because states, even weaker ones, do not easily give up their rights in a self-help anarchical system. Realism does not divorce itself from political reality. It even provided a preconceived warning about urban warfare particularly in nations with multiethnic diversity. The Bush administration advocated that the spread of democracy was the antidote to all of terrorism and ills emanating from the Middle East.

Robert A. Pape argues that Bush's strategy of unilateralism and hardline foreign policy has done away with the US reputation for endurable benign intentions and in response has compelled other states to adopt "soft balancing measures" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 206-7). Major rival powers have become more vigilant of Washington's unchecked authority and this was exemplified recently when Russia and China placed a veto on UN sanctions against the Syrian regime. This responsive behavior includes actions that do not directly challenge US military superiority, they instead utilize nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine US unilateral military interventions. Realists such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer believed that Saddam could have been deterred and contained even if Iraq developed a nuclear arsenal. His record has shown that he was not worse than Egyptian and Israeli leaders when they initiated several wars since 1948 (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 207-208). Saddam knew that he would not and could use WMD against the US since the retaliation would be immeasurable and catastrophic.

Public interests affect national interests and vice versa. The culture and values of domestic politics has an impact on national interests which shapes the development of foreign policy. Neoconservatives were able to win the debate over Iraq's invasion, because realism failed to generate commitment and resources in public political debate to secure its success. It generally suffers the fate of modern rationalism. The neocons proudly portray their policy as speaking on behalf of US national interest, proclaiming themselves as the advocates of authentic American culture and values who were derided and mocked by liberals and realists. If realists want to become more successful in political debates they must enlighten their policy preferences from a 'realpolitik' aspect; "realists need to be much more explicit about the values that underlie their favored

policy prescriptions and more expansive in their social and political analysis" (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 220). The next part discusses the weaknesses of Bush's foreign policy in failing to assess the realistic elements that should have been accounted for and remedied, especially in the wake of Saddam's removal.

3.4 What Went Wrong After Saddam's Downfall?

As has become apparent in the discussion above, the US invasion of Iraq back in 2003 was aided by neoconservatives using influential political rhetoric stemming from concepts of liberalism and idealism (the neoconservative derivation of that term). Unfortunately, the US either underestimated the value of or refrained from using liberalism's key instrument, international institutions, a fundamental element that promotes democracy. Politicians such as former National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, and former US Senator at the time, John Kerry, would go on to allege that it was an amalgamation of Wilsonian liberal theory and pragmatic realism that drove the war in Iraq (Snyder, 2004). Countries with weak political institutions when trying to evolve into democracies are more likely to enter (civil) wars as we are witnessing today in the MENA region to varying degrees. Jack Snyder (2004) gives prominent examples of nations that have suffered following experiences with mass electoral democracy, such as Ethiopia, Russia, and Armenia just to name a few. Further justifying this concept when weak political institutions are concerned, Iraq is yet again experiencing democracy failures. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki failed to produce a representative government and marginalized the rights of other Iraqi factions, including the Sunnis.

Now that he has stepped down in August 2014, he was replaced with a new incumbent PM, Haider al-Abadi.

Snyder (2004) asserts that disorder in these situations is partly due to the desire for self-determination. When that is ignored in evolving democracies, hostility arising from the indigenous people is redirected against the democratic allies of oppressive regimes. This was the case of many people in the Arab world regarding their disdain of the US government. According to Snyder, while the Bush administration tried to promote the advantages of liberal democracies it marginalized international institutions, liberalism's major contributor in international relations. G. John Ikenberry claimed that if international constitutional order were to become successful there should be legalism and transparency. Even though international institutions cannot restrain hegemonic powerful interests, it can provide long-term mutual interests that are guaranteed for both the weak states and the hegemon (Snyder, 2004, p. 58-59).

The Bush administration was so determined to start a war that they overlooked the second most critical phase, the aftermath of the war when Saddam was removed from power over a relatively short time span. They failed to anticipate or adequately prepare for dangerous scenarios and insurgencies, which led them to become careless in planning and implementing democracy and its principles that must be channeled through international institutions. The West cannot anticipate democracy to be a smooth transition in a country ruled by a despot for almost twenty-one years. The US cannot expect these nations to successfully implement change by simply mimicking the tenets of Western democracy. Idealism works for Western democracies but, as the name implies, it works best as an ideal especially for nations with the same collective values, culture, and social concepts that are established and developed within nations. Snyder

correctly observes that: "Idealism stresses that a consensus on values must underpin any stable political order, yet it also recognizes that forging such a consensus often requires an ideological struggle with the potential for conflict" (Snyder, 2004, p. 55). There was no consensus on values and ideas in the first place in Iraq, so one has to take that into serious consideration from the outset and be prepared for the worst in a divided society that suffers from tensions between religious and ethnic clusters. These social groups had very little respect for Western values, including democracy, or were influenced to view them with disdain.

We can witness frustration in Iraq today with the struggle between the Sunnis and the Shiites. It has also shifted and spread across Iraq's borders, with the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and their continued efforts to permeate to other neighboring countries. Snyder argues that the collective ideas and values of idealism might be harmonious but do not necessarily resolve all of human rights abuses. What is fundamentally missing is a tangible agent of democratic transition and moderation, i.e. liberalism's institutions. This weakness in idealism reflected negatively on US foreign policy in Iraq. Planned democratic change is best implemented through these valuable and effective institutions. The next portion of this chapter examines the material (oil) and ideological motives regarding the Bush administration's military intervention in Iraq which have taken a prominent role in various political debates and analysis.

3.5 Did the US Invade Iraq for Democracy or Oil?

Raymond Hinnebusch (2007) is in search of an explanation for why the Bush administration chose to invade Iraq since Saddam did not pose a substantial threat

against the US. Failure to remove Saddam from power would have constrained US freedom of action in the Middle East to some degree or may have posed a menace to Israel. In 2003, Washington and the majority of the media were swayed by the extremist/militarist wing of the Israeli lobby active in Washington (the pro-Likud neocons, such as Paul Wolfowitz) and the arms/oil lobbies (comprised of VP Dick Cheney and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld) who supported the 'Greater Israel' project. Nonetheless, mainstream International Relations theories seem to be weak in providing rationales for the war in Iraq. Hinnebusch (2007) believes realism has failed in delivering a valid account and that interests and ideology in concert with each other pushed for the war. He argues that Iraq's oil is the obvious materialist explanation for war and the desire for the US to dominate the oil market. While oil and Israel play a pivotal role in US hegemony, Hinnebusch (2007) claims that there were three more factors that influenced the Bush doctrine: The first pertained to a US grand strategy of global hegemony through unilateralism and coercive action; military capabilities over negotiations and deterrence. A shift in the US strategic position in the Middle East after 9/11 is the second component. Hegemony for oil became the target due to US oil vulnerability, the weakening of the 'Pax Americana' and a shaky relationship with Saudi Arabia. While the neocons were in power there was an opportunity for the US to strategically engage with military hegemony which would be an advantageous option for itself and Israel, as an alternative to balancing power in the region. The third swaying element, the class interests of the Bush's ruling coalition would be transferred to regime interests, specifically the oil-arms-construction complex. A war would raise oil prices, oil company shares and invite more arms spending. Hinnebusch (2007) argues that we should reevaluate the theories of 'hegemonic stability' (HST), because the Iraq war has

weakened its persuasiveness. With Iraq's war, the US has moved from being a benign hegemony and from playing the role of a balancer and led to empowering the idea of US Empire in political deliberations. Hence the Iraq war has proven that strategic territories remain indispensable, despite what globalization theorists assert that it entails "burdensome responsibilities". Nonetheless acquisition of territory might be to the benefit of gaining resourceful interests, such as the 'swimming in oil' logic. (Hinnebusch, 2007, p. 214-15). He claims that a different administration would have not invaded Iraq but rather revived the Israeli-Palestinian peace process or attuned its dual containment policy against Saddam. In present day, we can observe the return of an adjusted containment policy in reference to Obama's somewhat inactive policy concerning Syria's conflict and US limited action against ISIS.

On the other hand, Gause (2010) counters the hypothesis that the US invaded Iraq in order to secure oil resources. He argues that President Bush did display some ambiguity about his strategy concerning Saddam. He had supported the '1998 Liberation Act' and throughout his presidential campaign he also advocated for tougher sanctions and a forceful containment policy against Iraq's regime. When asked in an interview how he would react if he found out Saddam possessed WMD, his response was he would take "them" (the weapons) out. Even though the Bush administration did include proponents of military hardliners that urged for Saddam's removal, they did not completely influence Bush's opinion and policy until after 9/11. In the first month of Bush's tenure, the President opted for former Secretary of State Collin Powell's option to authorize more sanctions against Saddam that would put excessive pressure on him. Prior to the terrorist attacks, "smart sanctions" – modified sanctions against the regime that comprised of subtle diplomacy and a multilateral course – were put to the test by the

Bush administration. This proposal was not met with much enthusiasm internationally and eventually dwindled by summer 2001. Key players in the Bush administration such as Cheney and Rice and including the president himself started to treat even one percent doubt of WMD as a dangerous imminent threat. Saddam with a possible connection to al-Qaeda, speculations of WMD and a hostile history towards the US and its regional allies would have to be removed and punished immediately.

Did promotion of democracy become US policy in Iraq to serve as a justification for the invasion after no WMD were found? Gause (2010) refutes this argument. For the Bush administration democracy promotion since the lead-up to and throughout Iraq's invasion played an ancillary role to Saddam's WMD-terrorist nexus. The neocons claimed that a democratic Iraq would produce a wide-range of benefits for the region and the world. Iraq would serve as a democratic template for the liberation of other nations in the Middle East. Gause's argument seems to be weak in this aspect. How can there be democracy for some antagonistic part of the Middle East while undemocratic regimes such as Saudi Arabic and Egypt (under Hosni Mubarak's rule) remain in power without objections? Democracy promotion only plays a vital function when US security and interests are threatened and deemed to be in danger.

Was US military intervention in Iraq motivated by its desire to control Iraq's oil fields? The Gulf's oil has for some time been of strategic importance to the US and greatly affects American foreign policy. However, according to Gause (2010) the oil logic did not drive the US to a preemptive war in 2003. US oil companies were eventually established in Iraq after Bush had already completed his two presidential terms. However, when Bush was still president, American companies were not in a hurry to sign contracts for the development of new Iraqi oil fields. Only one major

contract was signed by the end of 2008 with a Chinese company (excluding oil deals in Iraqi Kurdistan with Turkish and Swedish energy firms). If Bush's strategy did consist of oil dominance it was negligent in its goal of securing a place for US energy and oil companies in post-war Iraq. And as for allegations of the US wanting to break ties with OPEC and weaken that group's position in the oil market, this did not take place either and Iraq did willingly resume its membership with OPEC once sovereignty was restored (Gause, 2010, p. 233-38). Therefore, there is not enough evidence about post-war oil planning in Iraq in the pre-war decision process to strengthen the argument that it was a war for oil.

3.6 The Effect of Iraq's War on the Arab Spring:

Louise Fawcett (2013) claims that Iraq's war has an important impact and continuity at a state, regional and international level that can allow us to assess the Arab uprisings and its future implications. At a state level, the protracted civil war in Iraq prompted fear in the authoritarian regimes throughout the region which led to brutal crackdowns on government opposition groups and emerging radical Islamic movements. Authoritarian regimes reserved experiments in political liberalization. This in turn motivated and pushed for mass social mobilization to demand democracy and regime change. At the international level, the current US administration prefers lower-profile regional engagement and multilateral action over unilateralism. The war also further pushed powerful rival states to underscore their power at a global level. However Fawcett (2013) reminds us, that Russia has essential economic and military links with its ally, Syria. Therefore it needs to retain the regional status quo even if weakened and

constrained. It's realism at its best, in Russia's foreign policy towards Syria. The Iraq war did eventually open up pathways for political change at the state level, however the Arab uprisings were internal and "national" bottom-up movements, while Iraq's war was an external intervention instigated and implemented by Bush and his team of neoconservatives. Maybe if the US had not intervened in Iraq, the Iraqi people themselves, influenced by the Arab Spring movements, would have protested for Saddam's ousting and democracy. Tunis has played a more inspirational role in being the first nation to call out for change and democracy and set the stage for a domino effect of Arab Spring revolutions. Even the authors of 'Beyond the Arab Spring' claim that the determination of the Syrian people to protest and fight for change was largely affected by the internal coup of the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorship regimes (Brynen et al. 2012, p. 46). The Iraq experience consequently led the public mass of other nations to become more guarded against US intervention. Western hubris contends that events in the Middle East are greatly affected by Western activity. However even if democracy is achieved and core Western interests are guaranteed to be secured, it will arrive on its own course. In the volatile and dynamic Middle East region, that is currently experiencing mayhem and a shift at a state and regional level, there will be "drift from dependence to greater autonomy-facilitated by domestic changes and a wider menu of international choices" (Fawcett, 2013, p. 342). There can nonetheless still be hope for change.

3.7 Conclusion:

The Bush administration thought 'bandwagoning' would be successful in the Middle East after extrinsically introducing democracy in Iraq. US foreign intervention was successful to a certain degree by forcibly ousting Saddam. US aid resulted in the formation of the Coalitional Provisional Authority (CPA) that served to facilitate the transition to democracy and help in the reconstruction of the nation (Brynen et al., 2012). US interests in Iraq were achieved, but stability became inconsistent and long term optimism post-Saddam was transitory. The Iraqi nation is continuously facing corruption, instability and sectarian tensions in government and society. Insurgencies and escalating terrorism has translated into religious and ethnic ground battles and massacres. The costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have consequentially shifted to the succeeding US administration. Obama's foreign policy towards the Middle East has also been tainted to a certain extent by Bush's big-stick diplomacy in Iraq. The next chapter will analyze Obama's soft-realist policy towards Syria's civil war, Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime, and will offer valuable suggestions by political authors for US policy alternatives in Syria.

Chapter Four

Obama and the Syrian Conflict

4.1 Introduction:

Barack H. Obama can be described as being part of the traditional Jeffersonian school within the Democratic Party. Obama believed that Bush "had put the United States on a suicidal course" (Lizza, 2011, para. 4). In his view, ideological conflict does not call for intervention and is not a hindrance to strategic relations between nations with opposing ideologies. His foreign policy goal comprises the minimization of US costs and risks overseas. According to Mead (2010), the current US president believes democracy can be best championed by becoming the exemplar of moderation in foreign policy and supporting peace at home. Obama had once stated in a presidential campaign prior to 2009 that he wanted to endorse a Ronald Raegan approach that would comprise of working with authoritarian leaders for regional security and stability and in return, help these nations to gradually democratize. This kind of endeavor would occasionally not prioritize the spread of democracy and might deemphasize pledges for human rights, but that would be the price to pay for having tyrannical leaders sit at the table. This method distances itself from the negative perceptions of US foreign policy that was the result of Bush's "Freedom Agenda" in the Middle East region (Lizza, 2011). This chapter will describe Obama's foreign policy in Syria so we can better understand his actions in the Middle East, while trying to discover if there is a concrete Obama doctrine.

4.2 The Evolution of Realism in US Syria Policy:

Since the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the United States pursued a realist foreign policy towards Syria. Notwithstanding Syria's name appearing on the 1979 US State Department list of state sponsors of terrorism and its continuous brutal repression of the Syrian people (including the Hama Massacre in 1982), its geopolitical position has always played a pivotal role in the region. In the 1970s and early 1980s, with the Soviet Union posing an overarching threat in the Middle East, the Reagan administration engaged with the Syrian Baath regime through diplomacy knowing that the latter can harm or advance US interests in the region. Syria provided stability by playing by the rules of balance-of-power in the Middle East, especially in the 1990-1991 Gulf War. A moderate-realist foreign policy towards Syria remained on Washington's agenda until George W. Bush's presidency. Despite the Syrian regime providing the US with helpful intelligence on al-Qaeda after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Bashar al-Assad's regime faced a choice between two political camps active in the region: the US and its principal ally Israel or its own regional allies Hezbollah and Hamas.

By the spring of 2002 the US had already labeled Syria as a "rogue state". And in December 2003 matters started to deteriorate when the US Congress, with bipartisan support, passed the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) that pushed for new sanctions condemning Syria for its support of Hezbollah and aiding the insurgents in Iraq. The Bush administration dealt with Syria by utilizing "opposition through isolation". Despite being affected by the economic recession, the US sanctions and falling global oil prices, this tactic did not produce any substantial changes within the Syrian regime (Sadat & Jones, 2009, p. 96). According to Sadat and

Jones, "the neoconservatives in the Bush administration exploited the democratic-peace theory to justify their actions against Iraq and potentially against other nations such as Iran and Syria" (Sadat & Jones, 2009, p. 97). Nonetheless America's isolationist policy towards Syria left a political vacuum to be filled by the adversaries or allies of the US. European nations such as Britain and France, critical of the Syrian regime, continued to deal with Syria on economic terms in hopes that it can encourage and entice the Syrian government to democratize. This kind of interaction is a fundamental tenet of the neoliberal theory which claims that the growth of economic and political interdependence can develop incentives for cooperation, therefore deterring military confrontation. Sadat and Jones (2009) suggest that a moderate-realist approach would be sufficient in opposing Syrian government actions that might contradict US national interests. On the other hand, the liberal approach can also protect US interests in the region when Syria, in return for assistance, can act as an architect of peace.

In 2009, the Obama administration started to employ a moderate-realist approach along with a liberalist commitment that would induce Syria to gradually introduce democracy and open up its financial market, therefore allowing more maneuvering and hopefully lessen oligarch control of businesses. Yet this policy would barely be tested due to the Syrian regime's crack down on public protests that emerged peacefully in the early spring of 2011. One has to ask, if the uprisings had not taken place what would be the status of US and Syria relations today? Would Syria have been en route towards reform? We can only speculate but never really know how circumstances might have differed.

During the Cold War years, the US engaged in a realist foreign policy in the Middle East in order to contain and defeat the Soviet Union's aim of global communism.

The opposition movements in the region were regarded "as cat's paws for Moscow" (Singh, 2011, p. 17). The US snubbed democratic values and turned a blind eye to the maltreatment of populations by authoritarian regimes even after the defeat of the Soviet's overarching goals. Now and as the Middle East experiences a proverbial tornado of social upheavals against ruling dictatorships, the US and its allies must work even harder to protect their interests and find resolutions for the regional conflict. The US can aid in the liberalization process by establishing stable alliances with the people and not just the regimes. With its efforts the US can guarantee technical and financial assistance that will help in building the proper political institutions for elections. They must generate space and forums for political debate while at the same time cease any attempts by internal and external extremists that can hinder genuine democratic projects. The US should also redirect its economic approach by aiding initiatives that can boost entrepreneurship and national economic prosperity without relying on Western assistance. The US has also modified its 'Millennium Challenge Corporation' approach to help build local ventures and enable indigenous reform (Singh, 2011, p. 20).

Syria has experienced forms of democratic trials in 2000 when Bashar al-Assad first inherited his presidential role after the passing of his late father, Hafez al-Assad. It was short-lived and ultimately collapsed. Notwithstanding moderate economic reforms, the government was not tolerant of legitimate democratic initiatives originating from dissenters and the Syrian public. Since the rise of the Arab Spring, Syria was eventually affected by these revolutions and the future of Syria remains unpredictable. The Syrian regime is again clamping down on democracy efforts, and introduction of reform and regime change seems bleak at this point. The next segment is about the rise of the Syrian

revolts, and how it has affected US strategic interests and foreign policy towards Syria and the Middle East region.

4.3 The Syrian Revolt:

When the Arab uprisings took the region by storm, it also caught Washington by surprise. Past US administrations had felt that the best way to promote stability in the region would be to support authoritarian regimes in order to prevent countries from transforming into communist or Islamist rule in the short-run with hopes that democracy would be gradually attained in the long term. Nader Hashemi states that "stability was a code word for support of authoritarian regimes that protected US interests from hostile forces emerging from within and outside the region" (Hashemi, 2012, p. 32). The danger inherent in times of upheaval can be seen in the example of Iran's 1979 revolution, where what started as a movement for democracy culminated in the Islamic Republic that became antagonistic to US interests. If the Middle East would follow the path of South Korea or Taiwan, which incrementally experienced reform in the 1980s, then transition to democracy would be highly probable without necessarily destabilizing the relationship between the US and its allies. Following the Arab Spring uprisings, it became apparent that generational changes in the hereditary politics of the Middle East could not be maintained any longer in the hopes that second generations, such as Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal Mubarak for example, would "drain the swamp" through gradual democratization (Gvosdev & Takeyh, 2012, p. 12). This bipartisan approach for maintaining stability in the Middle East was abandoned in the face of realism, when Bush Jr. changed the course of US foreign policy to unilateral "muscular" Wilsonianism.

And realism, whether intense or soft, is still embedded in Obama's foreign policy. Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Ray Takeyh (2012) believe that the US became more prepared to intervene directly if intervention would bear quick and minor costs with hardly any checks from other major powers that oppose interference. The primary example of this was 'Operation Odyssey Dawn' in Libya where a multinational coalition with US participation was instrumental in removing Gaddafi from power. However, until the present day we have not seen the likes of Operation Odyssey Dawn repeated in Syria, where humanitarian concerns and need for aid are more pressing. The US is targeting ISIS militants with airstrikes but the government forces of Assad are not on the target list and the Obama administration is clear to point out that this is not an action against the Syrian government. The US president perceives stability at this point as the safest position. A governing void in Syria is now being filled by extremist Salafi-jihadi groups like ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front. The secular opposition movements in Syria have further weakened and divided with the upsurge of these groups and lack of Western aid. While the US cannot afford another war such as the one it initiated in Iraq, it still must feel the need to act in Syria to achieve its national interests, including but not limited to halting the atrocities of Bashar's regime, reigning in the ISIS terror attacks and also with an eye at restraining Iran's nuclear capabilities.

After Bashar came to power, there was a promise of political and economic reforms (the stillborn Damascus Spring in 2000-2001). However, even though demands were calculated and reformers never called for outright regime change, these tolerated movements were later suppressed. Regardless of political change not becoming substantive, economic reform did somehow materialize. Some of the improvements included liberalization for commodities such as diesel, gasoline fuel and electricity, the

establishment of a stock exchange and licensing of private banks. The irony was that the Baath regime's original socialist policies with urban workers and peasants serving as the social base of the regime were soon replaced with a predatory neoliberal economy merged with authoritarian forces. In effect, this economic corruption triggered the rise of the social revolts within Syria.

The US kept silent during the first few months of the Syrian upheaval because Syria was still regarded as a valuable asset that could help maintain "the current hegemonic structure of power in the region" (Dahi & Munif, 2012 p. 329). Bashar's regime had been aiding the US in its global war on terror, in providing critical information through the intensive torture of Syrian civilians. As the protests and brutal crackdowns continued, Bashar's government lost its authority in the region and there were countless casualties due to the use of chemical weapons and the Syrian regime became more a liability that must be eliminated.

Israel's alliance with the US is also based on preserving stability in the region, while simultaneously preventing radicalization and religious zealotry. Israel views the Arab Spring revolts, in what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described as, "Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli and anti-democratic wave" (Hashemi, 2012, p. 44). Israel's objectives are similar to the objectives of US foreign policy in the Middle East region, and it primarily prefers the conservation of the pro-Western authoritarian regimes as a vital guarantee to its security in the region. Martin Indyk claims that the US has two main interests that it must protect in the Middle East region; the flow of the Persian Gulf oil and Israel's safety (Atlas, 2012). The following part is about Washington's policy options in Syria, presented by political authors and based on analysis of the exacerbating situation and its impact on US national interests and global

political position. It also includes two interviews: one conducted with Obama and the other with Hillary Clinton, concerning their opinion about Syria's war and US policy choices in finding a resolution for the conflict.

4.4 US Policy Options in Syria:

The vital and difficult question to answer today is how long will this conflict continue? Who will help the Syrian people realize their human rights and freedom of political determination? It seems Obama has so far been exerting a soft realist policy towards Syria in his rhetorical condemnation of the regime, while simultaneously applying a Jeffersonian idealist approach from afar.

Seth Kaplan (2008) is a proponent of incremental reform instead of dramatic change by Western intervention, since 'hard landing' can be explosive and chaotic especially in a country like Syria divided among ten sects. Its formal institutions are too weak and inexperienced to introduce democracy. Political and economic reforms must occur in a piecemeal fashion. Kaplan (2008) understands that in order to introduce and consolidate Western-Style democracy, security and unity are key elements. Therefore the Baath regime's powerful security apparatus and its social-welfare program could act as a means to achieve democracy. An effective recommendation would be to develop a Syrian National Security Council (SNSC), similar to that of Turkey's National Security Council (NSC). It can take on the role of an all-powerful judicial body, to oversee that changes are applied smoothly under unity and a secular nature. Membership would be based on a negotiated agreement that would allow the representation of the five major communal groups. Although this group might offend the democratic purists because it

can inhibit democracy in its organic form, Washington in association with the UN can opt for technical assistance for Syria's institutional reforms along with entry to foreign markets in exchange for Syria's gradual democratization process

From a military perspective, there are only a few options on the table for the current US administration to pursue. Sorenson (2013) outlines the five military options offered by chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey. Three of them include: Train, advice and assist the opposition; Control of chemical weapons; and Establishment of a no-fly zone (Sorenson, 2013, p. 8). While General Dempsey reviews a few potential courses of action, he fails to provide the desired outcome or the plan of the military force in achieving them. Nevertheless each action must be calculated before its implementation. Without a cautious and preconceived strategy, the situation will only exacerbate. Sorenson (2013) asserts there are no feasible military options that will do much to stop the Syrian violence. The danger with sending sophisticated arms to legitimate rebels is that they might fall into the hands of Salafi-jihadists that are antagonistic to Western interests. Arming rebels will only lead to "more inconclusive fighting, whatever the US motive" (Sorenson, 2013, p. 10). A no-fly zone on the other hand is ambiguous at this point, since the Syrian regime mostly relies on ground forces. A limited air strike can cause major damage to innocent civilians especially if there are chemical weapons among the regime's artillery. If the US will militarily intervene then the possible outcomes include Assad remaining in power, secular opposition groups gaining governance control and instituting democratic elections and reform, or Sunni jihadists or even ISIS prevail and gain control of most of the territories. In any case, there is a risk that the situation will worsen or at the very least that collateral damage will be much greater with the US military exercising its full force and that reconstruction

of Syria will be prohibitively expensive. There is also the real and dangerous risk of having the sectarian conflict spread over Syria's borders and there has already been some escalation in military confrontation in the Eastern-Bekaa region of Lebanon. Washington must work on containing the situation within Syria by also strengthening local powers that it views as friendly. No one in the region can afford the expansion of Syria's civil war that can further add a destructive chasm between the Shiites and Sunnis of the region. According to Sorenson (2013), America will lose in both situations. If it does not take action it will look weakened and if it does respond with an attack the situation will further escalate without a feasible exit strategy. The US does not equivocally share the same interests of the Alawite government. Bashar's regime has nowhere to go and everything to lose if it does not fight to the death. At this stage, the US administration should present its directive policy with valid credibility supporting it.

The US Presidential elections are not far from now and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (Goldberg, 2014) is trying to distance herself from Obama's policy which she has described as a "failure" that has kept the US on the sidelines when it had the chance to screen, train, and arm what would later become the Free Syrian Army during the earlier phases of the Syrian conflict. Clinton does not agree with what Obama has self-declared to be his guiding principle in this conflict: 'Don't do stupid stuff'. She recants his slogan by asserting that "great nations need organizing principles, and 'Don't do stupid stuff is not an organizing principle" (Goldberg, 2014, para. 7). It can at best serve as a general principle to not get carried away with another vision of enforcement. She later does offer a subtle defense of his position and explains that his statement can be understood as a political message and not his perception of what's happening in the world today. Obama is cautious because he inherited two wars, and an

ailing economy. He is trying hard to remove the US from the predicament it was in at the start of his presidency. The problem that lies in US foreign policy from the time of George W. Bush through Barak Obama's presidency is that it has wavered back and forth between two extremes; one being a muscular unilateral interventionist policy; and the other, a "don't do stupid stuff" approach in order to avoid a malicious problem like Syria's war. Hillary warns us that when there is a political vacuum in nations that barely have the means to nurture their broken societies and are trying hard to achieve nationalism, there will be immoral figures, such as jihadists trying to fill that empty space (as happening today in Syria). The best approach to restrain this challenge would be, "containment, deterrence and defeat" (Goldberg, 2014, para. 14). An example of this can be seen in recent history when though despite some of the measures taken to overcome communism were unethical or distasteful in many aspects, the preliminary overarching plan of defeating the Soviet Union was successful.

Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger (2012) claims that US foreign policy should not be blamed for the present havoc in the region, nor can it solve all the shortcomings in a nation's domestic issues and policy. Nevertheless, when Bush reviewed past US policy in the Middle East, he stated in a famous 2003 speech, "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe - because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty" (Hashemi, 2012, p. 33). The US for many years, ignored the voice of the suppressed indigenous people that were longing for democratic values and self-determination, in order to attain stability in the region. Nader Hashemi (2012) claims that the true root of political division within these nations does not reside in the fact that populations segregate into pro-Western and anti-Western camps but that

the true struggle is between enduring regimes and the people they preside over. In contrast to Hashemi's contention, the West colonial powers were replaced by Arab autocrats that accommodated US interests in the region, eventually causing a rift between the West and the people in the Middle East. In effect, it became easier for the US to work with authoritarian regimes who would secure the regional balance-of-power, which as a result caused resentment and revolutionary aspirations among the masses. Hashemi (2012) underlines that the problem was that the West clearly disregarded the broader aspirations of the local people, further building skepticism and mistrust of US strategic interests.

According to Kissinger (2012), the US is deeply perplexed by Syria's situation. It has a strategic interest in ending the alliance between Assad's regime and Iran which it is unwilling to acknowledge and the humanitarian purpose of saving innocent lives that cannot unanimously be agreed upon in the UN Security Council. US effort must fall within the framework of its strategic interests. Although its direction has not been clearly delineated, it is willing to support democracy in the Middle East provided that the means to this change is compatible with its national interests and finds a harmonious counterpart in the interests and values of the regional aspirants. The subsequent part of this chapter discusses the tenets of realism and idealism and their sway on the US decision-making process regarding foreign policy in Syria.

4.5 The Tensions between Realism and Idealism in Obama's Syria Policy:

The realists have always warned about indigenous people seeking a sense of self-determination and nationalism and caution against applauding idealism's spread of democracy and urging to join the US bandwagon. With the emergence of the Arab uprisings, the US will find it increasingly difficult to impose the policies they have traditionally applied and followed in the Middle East. Even if these new movements may seem moderate and cooperative at first, their volatile nature means they may potentially transform relatively rapidly and become anti-Western. The world has already witnessed this kind of experience with President Gamal Abdel Nasser and his aspiration for pan-Arab nationalism in the region. The US administration will support the democratization processes of other states as long as it does not counter its interests. Another example of US clash of interests with a Middle East form of democracy was Turkey's temporary fallout with the Bush administration in the lead-up to Iraq's invasion, when the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan sided with the Turkish public opinion against aiding the US to open a second battlefront from the north, across the Turkish-Iraqi border. The US reaction was a backlash against the freest and most inclusive Turkish regime after years of an intrusive authoritarian rule by the military. Former Deputy Defense Secretary, Paul Wolfowitz criticized their lack of cooperation and even wished that the military had played a major role in shaping Turkey's decision as the war on Iraq was being planned (Hashemi, 2012).

Atlas (2012) points out the weakness of both realism and idealism: the former is cynical because it tolerates regime repressiveness and human rights abuses, while the

latter seems to be naïve as it often contradicts the "realities" of the international system and power politics. Humanitarian interventions and waging wars to change regimes and spread democracy oppose the tenets of realism. But it is also true that, as Morgenthau contended, realism also "saves us from moral excess and political folly" (Atlas, 2012, p. 355). The next section examines the reasons why the US and its European allies opted to militarily intervene in Libya's conflict while choosing to limit its interference in Syria's brutal civil war. It also explores the possibility of a perceptible Obama Doctrine that acts upon US military force and can be applied when necessary.

4.6 Intervention in Libya and Non-Intervention in Syria:

The case of Libya appears to be more of an "anomaly" rather than a US model for future humanitarian-military intervention in the Middle East. Atlas (2012) discusses the "Obama Doctrine". Some of its key elements include: "an imminent threat of massive state violence against civilians"; "air power only-no boots on the ground"; "the mission must be consistent with both US interests and American values" (Atlas, 2012, p. 370). Most importantly the operation must be in partnership with a multilateral military coalition so the US can also share the burden of costs with them. Libya's struggle contained all of these features. It is becoming more apparent that an "Obama Doctrine" is too exacting in its criteria and demanding in its qualification and thereby excludes many nations from military intervention as part of US foreign policy as is the case with Syria. It can be a valid viewpoint to claim that no "Obama Doctrine" actually exists and that it is more of a rule of inaction which allows for some specific exceptions. Obama entered the presidential arena with a promise to move away from a crusading policy in

spreading democracy (ideology) and to treat US course of action based on protection of strategic interests, detached from a pre-conceived fixed set of ideologies. Another weak point of Obama's approach and the UN-sanctioned NATO's plan at the time in Libya was that there was no clear endpoint for the military operation. Obama was perceived as making plans which have limited scope but no clear goals and this uncertainty may have played a role in making Russia and China not buy into the US plan for sanctions against the Assad regime and veto that decision in the UN (Atlas, 2012). An additional interesting argument against a strike akin to 'Operation Odyssey Dawn' in Syria is the geographic landscape. Syria's urban and rural areas are highly populated unlike Libya whose inhabitants are scattered in a massive desert. Therefore, the Syrian army would be more problematic to defeat unlike Gaddafi's forces.

Amos N. Guiora (2012) believes that Obama's policy falls short of enacting significant measures against Bashar's regime. US policy directions have been ineffective and inconsistent (since Obama's Cairo Speech in 2009). The other setback lies in the vagueness in the criteria for when international intervention is justified. What factors differ in the military intervention against Qaddafi's regime directed by the US in comparison to non-intervention in Syria, when both regimes have massacred their people? At this point in time, the Assad regime's atrocities against the Syrian public are far greater than what occurred in Libya. The elusiveness as to when intervention is warranted "is one of interpretation, subject to specific circumstances and particular interests" (Guiora, 2012, p. 272). There were barely any direct mutual interests under threat with Libya. Syria on the other hand for years was believed to be a "linchpin" in the Middle East peace talks. Guiora believes that the US being a superpower must strongly portray moral and military leadership. And the US president can reinstate

confidence in leadership by taking on responsibility to act even if criteria for intervention are ambiguous, and that this should not discourage Obama from helping the Syrian people.

A coalition of international intervention, summoned by UN Security Council's 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), enabled by NATO and the use of military force by the US, defeated Gaddafi's regime. Nonetheless, democracy and stability remain weak in Libya due to continuous corruption and societal division. Social disruption persists and groups of armed mafia-like militias refuse to unite under government authority and take on the role of an operative police force. The absence of a substantial development plan in establishing strong reform elements failed to consolidate democracy in Libya. The strikes against the Libyan army in March 2011 were effective because UN member states agreed to endorse R2P for Qaddafi's crimes against Libyan civilians. Nevertheless this was a one-time approved operation. R2P's drawback is due to its inconsistent selectivity by the international community, because member states act upon their national interests. The more that intervention in a troubled nation threatens the security interests of other states, the higher the potential costs of intervention and as a result the practice of R2P becomes unreliable. Syria acts as stabilizing force in the Middle East region with significant US allies surrounding its border. International military intervention in Syria will eventually put much more strain on US expenditure than Libya did and most likely produce dangerous risks and threats to the region and vital US interests (Nanda, 2012).

One of the short-term lessons Williams and Popken (2012) mention that must essentially be learned from Libya's experience and examined with vigilance are the benefits in planning for the "Day After" the storm has calmed and when transition must

progress. It is natural for new constituents to deal with challenges. They should try their best through planning and incentives to overcome these confrontations. Preparation beforehand can also aid in detecting and grooming future potential leaders and help collect the essential resources needed for a healthy democracy. A well-studied transition plan can allow local and international stakeholders to reinforce pro-democracy opposition activities. However, when undergoing transition that is prone to fragile circumstances and lacking a developed strategy and leadership, the remnants of the old rule or new authoritarians can try to retake the government. For example, a modified form of authoritarianism is the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt, as it managed to reinstitute itself in the government since the pioneers of Egypt's democracy movement were inexperienced in the short time-span they had to grasp the reigns of power after the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Obama although described by some critics as inactive others scholars have characterized him as rationally associating realism and idealism together based on calculation of important realities and US strategic interests. The subsequent section is about Obama's soft-realist policy in Syria and the factors that shape the US administration's approach to the Syrian regime and civil war.

4.7 Obama's Soft-Realist Foreign Policy Towards Syria:

In an interview with Thomas L. Friedman in August 2014, Obama made it clear that when a country is facing political and economic turmoil the problem must be dealt with from within. The government should essentially make compromises that voice the opinions of the various sects including the minorities. In order to combat corruption, the

leaders and people should take full responsibility in changing their cultures, and then at this point the US will help them to a certain extent. However, the democratizing agents must be the sole front-runners in leading the transition process. Obama's insight on this issue recalls Henry Kissinger's aforementioned argument that the US should not be held accountable for the problems in the Middle East nor should they provide all the answers to the problems in the domestic governance of other countries. He gives the example of the Iraqi Kurds who successfully seized an opportunity to evolve from within their national framework and progress forward in political self-determination by assuming direct accountability for their responsibilities and demonstrating a tolerance of other sects and religions. The Kurds are willing to work together on building a strong cooperative government and society and the US is keen on giving them that chance and come to their aid, especially in a time of genocide threats. The remainder of Iraq on the other hand cannot expect the US to bail them out again if they cannot realize their mistakes and fix them promptly. Obama's interview with Thomas L. Friedman (2014) suggests that the US was ready to help and militarily intervene provided that the government and people agree to work together willingly, that the US has local and international allies capable of producing self-sustaining developments and can effect a plan for institutionalizing democracy for the "day-after". According to Obama the maximalist position by the government must be discarded, because "sooner or later that government's going to break down" (Friedman, 2014, para. 12). As for his opinion concerning Syria, supporting secular rebels in a deeply divided Syria is an extremely perilous challenge. To arm a group composed of white and blue collar men with barely any experience on the battlefields so they can put up an artillery fight against a well-equipped army supported by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, is a far-fetched idea.

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Kissinger, and other scholars, describe Obama as "a hybrid president: a progressive pragmatist" (Atlas, 2012, p. 360). Atlas describes Obama's policy since his first term as integrating the principles of both realism and idealism. The underlying rhetoric in many of Obama's speeches concerning the Arab uprisings is based on one of the views of idealism, where right is preferred over might. It can again be echoed when Obama quoted Thomas Jefferson, in his 2009 Cairo speech: "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, to teach us the less we use our power the greater it will be" (Atlas, 2012, p. 359). Obama marginalized Indyk's Middle East "exception". The illusion of stability under false pretense, where people are really living in fear and under repression can no longer be accepted. Therefore since America believes that it represents the beacon of freedom, the US administration should advocate for democratic values and human rights, while simultaneously protecting its essential national interests and security.

Hashemi (2012) thought that Obama was on the right trajectory concerning his policy towards the uprisings in the region. Obama declared he would fully support transitions to democracy. He eventually found a balance between American interests and values. Nonetheless he was willing to forgo the past US policy approach of siding with authoritarian regimes even if it meant to put US interests at risk to a certain extent. The Arabs needed a chance for their voices to be heard. However Obama's policy concerning Syria's turmoil has stopped there. It still is the same rhetoric; condemnation of Bashar's regime, sanctions, promotion of reform by non-intervention and as author Fawaz Gerges stated, an adoption of a centrist-realist approach (Hashemi, 2012, p. 46). Obama has made it clear as long as US core interests and the safety of the homeland are

not threatened it will not act unilaterally. The US will try to build a broad coalition based on multilateral consensus (Atlas, 2014, p. 369).

Aaron David Miller (2014) claims Obama's Syria policy is held hostage to Iran's maneuver. The US and Iran are working on a nuclear deal that Obama cannot disregard. Should he make the decision to militarily intervene in Syria, there is a significant chance that many members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard fighting along Syria's army maybe among the casualties. This would set back the diplomatic talks between Iran and the US that have rekindled in the form of the Geneva interim agreement that took place on November 24, 2013 regarding Iran's nuclear program. The talks seem to be heading in a positive direction and the last thing the US needs is to surround Iran's ally, the Syrian Alawite regime, in the name of humanitarian intervention, particularly if backed by the Sunni Gulf monarchies. If Iran continues to develop its nuclear weapons, Israel might strike Iran thereby also involving the US in a broader regional conflict. Bashar's ousting would diminish Iran's influence in the region, including its sway in Lebanon through its conduit Hezbollah. On the other hand, Israel's apprehension will dangerously intensify since Sunni-extremists have the chance of taking over the Syrian government post-Bashar. The Syrian president justifies that the legitimacy of his regime opposes the Islamists that represent terrorisms and are hostile towards US intentions. Obama, having chosen a soft realist policy approach in Syria up until this point, now needs to work hard in convincing Bashar to step down and Iran to terminate its nuclear plans. Will this strategy work in the two years left of his last term? Miller (2014) believes the results will be undesirable for the president due to the unpredictable nature of the political world particularly in the Middle East region.

Ryan Lizza (2011) has attempted to explain Obama's policy and define whether there is an Obama doctrine, meanwhile noting that this question continues to frustrate the US president's aides while they compare Obama's approach to former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's strategy of dealing with conflicts as "events". Obama succeeded Bush at a time when American exceptionalism was declining worldwide because of two wars, a failing economy and an austere national budget. Obama began his presidency with a promise to retract US foreign policy from missions based on ideology and politics and bring back realism calculated according to " the sobering facts on the ground and our interests in the region" (Lizza, 2011, para. 4). In 2007 he claimed in one of his campaigns that the US's criteria of intervention will not solely serve the purpose to stop genocides, if that was the case, US forces would have been all over the world trying to save those being massacred by their oppressive leaders such as in Congo or South Sudan. His assertion can be very well understood as a preconception on how Obama would deal with Syria's strife in four years' time until present day. Even when Obama had the chance to arm the rebels, he believes that those who argue it would have made a difference stand at odds with what is realistic, especially in fighting a trained army with hardened allies. According to Lizza, since Hosni Mubarak's removal in 2011, "Obama's ultimate position, it seemed was to talk like an idealist while acting like a realist" (Lizza, 2011, para. 17) Well in reference to today's setting of political upheavals in the region, Obama's strategy to a great extent remains the same since 2011. Syria's sectarian divisions, those who are loyal to Bashar and those who loathe him, Israel's security, Syria's geopolitical position between friends of the US, its possible contribution to the peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis, its allies Iran and Hezbollah and among other troubling factors the escalation of ISIS and the risk its poses,

all adds to Obama's indecisive decision and soft-realist foreign policy towards Syria. The US is also dealing with problems of its own including the specter of Iraq's war, a divided congress and polity concerning whether or not the US should militarily intervene and strike the Syrian army. Brzezinski, while admiring Obama's understandings and perceptions, believes the president's weakness is that he lectures on what's imperative when he should really be strategizing. In Obama's view, foreign policy objectives can be hindered if American leadership is highly visible just as it can be strengthened by it. One of his advisers said that his policy in Libya can be regarded as "leading from behind" which is not a desirable slogan for the president of a world superpower (Lizza, 2011, para. 23). However we cannot blame Obama for all the problems in the world today, we must also be patient and wait and see how events will unravel in the Middle East, who will partner with the US and who will continue to defy its foreign policies and what opportunities should Washington seize and what bad choices must it avoid.

Walter Russell Mead (2010), states that Jeffersonian foreign policy is often criticized by other schools of thought. Wilsonians think the Jeffersonian restraint approach of reducing US foreign endeavors, as a failure to act morally. Jacksonians, the far right conservatives, view the political nature of Jeffersonians as purely cowardice. And while the Hamiltonians share the same perceptions of limiting commitments abroad in specific circumstances, they believe that restraint can also wane American power when it should be projected adequately in dangerous situations. Jeffersonians are at conflict between limited realism found on their agenda and the idealist values of Wilsonianism that advocates their responsibility of saving lives for humanitarian purposes abroad. President Jimmy Carter faced this quandary when he dismissed

proposals allowing the Iranian Shah to crush protesters with violence. Although many critics perceive Jeffersonians as being too passive, for the latter a war would be the least attractive option to pursue because of its risks and costs. In a Jeffersonian assessment, the American model of democratic governance is an organic product of US history and unique American experience. It is not therefore a template that can readily be used to duplicate and mold democracies elsewhere. While critics of this view regard American exceptionalism as myopic, it nonetheless has served in preventing "imperial overstretch" and may also curtail the Obama administration, or future presidents to come, from embarking on ambitious and ill-conceived wars (Mead, 2010). It may be that this Jeffersonian approach, which values caution and restraint, is at the root of Obama's soft-realist foreign policy approach when it comes to the question of military intervention in Syria.

4.8 Conclusion:

This chapter offers insights regarding Obama's approach to policy towards Syria and Assad's authoritarian regime. At this point the US, Europe and most Middle East nations are caught in a quandary with Syria's escalating war and the rising threat of Salafi-jihadi groups that are continuously affecting the Middle East regional balance. Obama, in his Jeffersonian approach in dealing with Syria's violent crisis, adheres to the principles of realism in trying to preserve the regional status quo and avert disruption, while also securing US strategic interests and pragmatically supporting democracy movements in the Middle East. He has made it clear by his policy in Syria that the US will not militarily intervene unless the Homeland's critical interests are significantly

threatened or American assets are put in harm's way. US military intervention in serious conflicts will take place if there is multilateral consensus from US allies and a well-developed plan to implement democracy on the ground after strikes have destroyed targets. The next chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the focal points of the thesis argument and closes with a discussion of US foreign policy implications in Iraq and Syria and future research questions.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Summing Up the Thesis:

When George W. Bush became president in January 2001, the world was moving past the Cold War era and many nations around the world were enamored with the dominance of globalization in international relations. Communism was gradually collapsing in Eastern Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Francis Fukuyama became an overnight sensation in the political world when he claimed in his renowned essay, "The End of History", that ideological evolution had been put to a halt because Western liberalism had successfully prevailed (Fukuyama, 1989)[2]. He further added that it will eventually influence the political and societal structure as much as it will affect the economic sphere. Fast forward to two decades later and in another part of the world, the Middle East, despots continue to this day to use brutal force and threats in order to further strengthen their power and consolidate the grasp of their regimes. It seemed that the inevitable spread of political and economic liberalization had for the most part skipped this region of the world.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks left the American people in shock over the tragic loss of thousands of innocent lives and in deep anxiety about their future and the new invisible enemy that had reached deep into their homeland. The US public and administration had strongly felt the wrath of the terrorists, who loathed US foreign

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[2] http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm

policy in the Middle East region. The Bush administration needed to retaliate and bring safety to the homeland, while protecting its national interests. Ideological evolution had not withered away and history did not 'end', it was yet again alive and will go on to play a prominent role in the Bush administration post 9/11. The events of that day, and the days to follow, were framed by Bush as a struggle between freedom and liberty against tyranny and terror. It was the axis of good in battle with the 'axis of evil'. It was framed as an effort to neutralize a threat from weapons of mass destruction and as a quest to save Iraq and most importantly the US from a despot and introduce America's ideal of democracy. In effect, the Bush administration marginalized the 'traditional' policy of US realism in order to promote the paradigm of idealism or what Mearsheimer (2005, p. 1) calls, "Wilsonianism with teeth".

The decision to invade Iraq and change its regime was not born in the aftermath of this attack, but rather had already been nurtured by regime change 'hawks' in US foreign policy discourse since the 1990s. In addition to the neoconservatives lobbying for this war, other US strategic interests were also served by invading Iraq, particularly the stability of oil reserves and the security of Israel. They naturally served as important elements but were not the sole driving factors. Bush was convinced that the root of the problem had originated from previous US policy that supported realism's balance-of-power and the status quo in the Middle East for too long. US administrations aligned themselves with authoritarian regimes at the cost of people's liberty in the region. Deterrence and containment were no longer welcome in US foreign policy; they were believed to lead to failure in the long-run. In short, a neoconservative agenda had replaced realism. The neoconservatives portrayed themselves as crusaders for American values and culture. This substantially influenced their national interests which eventually

contributed to US foreign policy. Saving Iraq from a tyrant like Saddam would benefit the US by creating a friendlier Middle East while simultaneously securing US interests and ensuring the safety of the homeland.

What would later become known as the 'Bush Doctrine' included four major elements that would sway public rhetoric in congress and among the American people. The first component was that of 'big-stick diplomacy' and the readiness to use overwhelming military power in a preemptive fashion to deliver a decisive and relatively quick change in factors on the ground. Termed "revolution in military affairs" (RMA), the advanced technological might of the US would devastate opposing forces and deliver such "shock and awe" that military action would be brief and costs would be limited. The second component, they anticipated, would come into play in the power vacuum that follows military victory, where the US implements changes that lay the foundation for a democratic process of self-governance in Iraq. This stems from the democratic-peace theory and the belief that democracies are less likely to behave in an aggressive or malevolent manner towards other democracies. To the neoconservatives, the root problem in the Middle East was lack of democracy and, through this 'muscular' Wilsonian idealism of spreading democracy, they would remedy the situation in a fundamental manner that containment and deterrence would never have achieved (Mearsheimer, 2005). Thirdly, the Bush Doctrine theorized that nations around Iraq would learn lessons from the success of the war and subsequent democratization of Iraq and would surrender in fear of US global and military power and jump on the US bandwagon with minimal resistance. The bandwagoning logic, as Mearsheimer (2005) termed it, would spread democracy throughout the region as the "domino theory" would predict. All of the above would achieve the final component of the Bush Doctrine, which

was the main objective in the pursuit of the war in Iraq: maintaining a unipolar system while enforcing a US leadership stance facilitated by unilateralism. Big-stick diplomacy is best implemented under unilateralist decisions. The Bush administration purposely chose military force over diplomacy because the latter necessitates multilateral dialogue and compromise. There can be little chance of such diplomacy leading to a toppling of Saddam efficiently and effectively through an 'RMA' strategy. The US unilaterally side-stepped the UN Security Council's inaction to act in Iraq and primarily depended on its own military power in achieving its goal.

The Bush policy in Iraq was ultimately a failure. That failure was perhaps inevitable when we look at the components of the 'Bush doctrine' both collectively and individually. Collectively, there appears to have been a grave cognitive bias on the part of neoconservatives when they assumed that the elements of their plan would naturally follow each other in an inexorable sequence of events. What evidence did they have to support that idea? It seems there was very little besides wishful thinking. Jervis put it best when he said that "many of the reasons they give are rationalizations, not rationales, and come to their minds only after they have reached their decisions" (Jervis, 2003, p. 318). Hinnebusch (2007) rightly claims that a different administration would have not invaded Iraq, but rather would have re-initiated the peace process or attuned its dual containment policy against Saddam.

Individually, the elements of the Bush Doctrine also met with failure or were ineffective, and often results ran counter to aspirations. The Iraqi army in its traditional form was quickly defeated and dissolved when faced with the "shock and awe" campaign, but life on the ground remained far from safe and secure for many years following the start of the invasion and the declaration of "mission accomplished" from

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the deck of a US aircraft carrier was arbitrary. The filling of the power vacuum with a democratic robust government was also flawed. In a deeply divided, sectarian, and multi-ethnic nation like Iraq, the attempted democracy was and remains a victim of "patronage, corruption and the consolidation of executive power" (Brynen et al., 2012, p. 56). Neighboring Arab states have been demanding democracy and reform but not because of bandwagoning and wanting to fall in line with the US policy in Iraq as much as due to organic and intrinsic bottom-up movements. US interests are still not secure in the Middle East and often fall under precarious situations. Arab Spring uprisings have destabilized the US administration's long term allies such Egypt and the Gulf States and instead of weakening Iran's regional sway, the war has buttressed the relationship between Iraqi Shiites in governmental positions and Iran, in effect strengthening the latter's regional power.

Ryan Lizza (2011) underlined how Obama lacked the intimate knowledge and experience in foreign policy shortly before the latter ran his first presidential campaign. Obama wanted to start afresh with less interaction in the Middle East and engage diplomatically with and lean towards Southeast Asian countries and engage the global economy. When Obama became president he was left to deal with the financial and political burden of two wars, not to mention the nursing of a troubled economy back to health. Prior to his presidential ascendancy in 2009, Obama vowed he would retreat from ideology and return to a realistic foreign policy generally based on hard actualities and US interests in the region. His approach to US foreign policy was to a large degree a Jeffersonian attitude, choosing to focus on domestic reforms rather than continuing Bush's venture of applying global Wilsonian idealism. He wanted to safeguard American exceptionalism at home by freeing it from burdensome commitments abroad.

The hubris of the Bush policy had over-extended the ability of the US to act on the world stage and he believed a "highly visible American leadership can taint a foreign-policy goal just as easily as it can bolster it" (Lizza, 2011, para. 23). His other endeavors when he entered office included tempering US national security policy centered primarily on the terrorism threat that was revived after 9/11. When uprisings came boiling to the surface across the Middle East in 2010 Obama publicly applauded calls for democracy and reform in some Arab nations, while also expressing some reservations about regime change in other countries, such as Egypt. Nonetheless, his reaction towards the revolts gradually shifted and support for maintaining the status quo and balance-of-power was side-lined. In effect Obama seems to exert a rather soft-realist policy towards the Middle East. He strongly rejects imposing ideology on foreign nations. He believes, as he once stated in a 2006 speech, that the Bush administration used the goal of humanitarian intervention to engage in transforming of nations into democracies while exhausting the US military to a point that it averted attention away from the escalating real threats going on in the world.

Many have questioned if there is a concrete Obama Doctrine that can be called upon to act in Syria's current conflict. Obama has adopted a hybrid foreign policy framework with both realist and idealist themes. He has made it unambiguous that as long as US core interests and the physical safety of the homeland are not directly jeopardized, he is only willing to engage in military action based upon multilateral consensus and shared financial costs. As we have seen in the case of Libya, direct US contribution to multilateral humanitarian military action under the "Obama Doctrine" falls subject to the following mandatory requisites: "the mission must be consistent with both US interests and American values"; "an imminent threat of massive state violence

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against civilians must be present"; "risk to US military personnel is minimized by relying primarily on air power with no boots on the ground" (Atlas, 2012, p. 370). Only exceptional circumstances would satisfy all these criteria and that goes a long way in explaining why the likes of the US military intervention in Libya has not recurred elsewhere in the Middle East. The US is targeting ISIS militants with airstrikes but the government forces of Assad are not on the target list and the administration is clear to point out that this is not an action against the Syrian government. For those who are in search of or are trying to theorize about an Obama Doctrine, in my opinion that is a fruitless pursuit. Obama is a strategist and he deals with grave global issues as "events" (Lizza, 2011), instead of endorsing an ideology or doctrine to act as a guideline comparable to the method of his predecessor. If there is an Obama Doctrine that entails the above-mentioned provisions then it is too demanding to occur with facility and its unknown vision and outcome would be met by suspicion from other nations.

In my opinion and based on my research, Bashar al-Assad's regime is not considered a direct imminent threat to the US. Syria does not contain critical interests and security purposes that must be addressed as was the case in Iraq before 2003. Nonetheless, Syria does have a strong hold on the stability of the region, whether by its geopolitical significance located at the heart of escalating tension, or by a role as a key player in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talk efforts. Syria can still promote or sell US interests. Despite claims of Syria turning into a liability, it continues to serve as a significant resource in the balance-of-power in the Middle East region. If the US had not considered it to be valuable it would have reacted otherwise with strong measures against the Syrian regime, when it trampled over Obama's cautionary "red line" regarding use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians in the summer of 2013.

Obama is caught in a dichotomy between maintaining a constrained Jeffersonian realist foreign policy while occasionally adhering to some key elements of Wilsonian idealism.

If the US partnered with European and Middle East allies based on a multilateral agreement and intervened in Syria's conflict and defeated Assad's regime, its reconstruction will in all likelihood be too costly and commitments would probably outrun resources. At this point, the US and its European allies are strictly discouraged by their respective administrations and the public from intervening in Syria's conflict out of fear of who might fill the empty Syrian vacuum post-Assad. With the threat of a growing ISIS and continuous sectarian conflicts, chaos and insurgencies will disrupt regional stability and US interests will possibly be in grave danger. Obama may also be choosing not to intervene in Syria's civil war due to renewed nuclear talks with Iran that since 2013 have been building a moderately optimistic foundation between the two countries. If the US chooses to intervene with direct military action in Syria, a strike against the Syrian army will most likely also include causalities from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, the active military component of Iran's current support for the Assad regime. Ultimately talks will unravel and Iran's nuclear capabilities may advance and become a dangerous threat against the US and its allies (Miller, 2014).

5.2 The Way Forward for US Middle East Policy:

What is the way forward from here for the US and its foreign policy? How will the unraveled threads come together once more to move this region forward? Michael Singh (2011) along with other political activists and scholars prescribe ways in which the US can help opposition movements achieve democracy while fighting against

corruption and forms of authoritarianism. Assistance can be delivered in the form of support for overcoming economic challenges since democracy cannot overcome corruption on its own and they both have an equally substantial effect on each other. Recommended efforts include increasing sanctions against kleptocracy and corrupted government officials, stimulating local economic growth, providing technical and financial aid without nurturing dependency. These measures can build and improve political institutions which are indispensable in providing elements of reform and democracy, such as free elections, political debates and deliberations, forums, use of the media and Internet penetration (Singh, 2011, p. 18-19). Singh also asserts that an alliance must also develop between the US administration and the indigenous people, since the latter's frustration and animosity towards the US emanates from America's friendly association with the authoritarians. Hillary R. Clinton and David S. Sorenson believe that at this point and with events unraveling impulsively and dangerously, the US must work on containing the situation within Syria before its implodes and affects the whole Middle East region as a religious sectarian war with no boundaries. This will eventually take a costly toll on the rest of the world, including US national and strategic interests.

If the US approaches the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an honest and sincere broker for peace and sets a goal of achieving a two-state solution while at the same time taking into account reasonable Arab demands, this can be advantageous for the Obama administration or its successor and can reshape Arab public perception of the US in a positive light. It would also safeguard the long-term success of US foreign policy in the region (Atlas, 2012, p. 380). As for reform in Syria, the US and its allies will have to protect and tend to the legitimate security apprehensions of the Syrian minorities, such

as the Christians and Alawites, in order to encourage and achieve democratic transition within Syria (Atlas, 2012, p. 374).

Obama can also learn from the second-term of his predecessor. Bush in his second tenure became more hands-on in the management of foreign policy issues and opted for more diplomatic approaches in international settings. He reshaped his team while at the same time he addressed and tried to correct the past errors of his administration. He dealt with micromanagement matters such as weekly videoconference meetings with his team in Iraq and regular interactions with former Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki (Rothkopf, 2014).

Syria's conflict in the eyes of Washington is viewed as a domestic issue to be dealt with within its borders. Nonetheless, the disorganization of internationally recognized Syrian opposition group does not explain or justify one of the reasons as to why the US cannot militarily intervene and help the authentic revolutionaries. Amos Guiora argues even though international law lacks normative standards to intervene for humanitarian purposes, it does not excuse inconsistent policy. National leaders have the responsibility to take action, especially Obama being the president of the sole superpower in the world today. However, and without being defensive or biased towards any president, Obama is exerting a calculated soft-realist foreign policy and as long as US core interests and the safety of the homeland are not in serious danger, he believes his adopted approach can contain, at least for the near future, issues arising from the Middle East today.

5.3 Future Thoughts:

When political scientists analyze and dissect the policy of the Bush administration and discuss the results of the Bush Doctrine in the Middle East, they have the benefit of hindsight due to the amount of time that has passed since those policies were implemented. They can examine causes and their effects, assess decisions and their aftermaths. When it comes to the situation in Syria and the Obama policy regarding the Assad regime, events are still unfolding at a rapid rate and repercussions of his policy are not as clear.

Comparisons between the foreign policy of the US under Presidents Bush and Obama that have been made in the preceding chapters have focused on the role of ideology and the schools of thought which brought these policy choices to bear. Future research can further this comparison by contrasting not only the policies themselves and their origins but also their short and long-term effects and results. Once enough time has elapsed for events in the Middle East to unfold we will be witness to those results and whether the interests of the US, its allies in the region, and the states of the Middle East as a whole were better served by the soft-realism of Obama than by the idealism of his predecessor. A new administration will be at the helm of the US in two years. Will that administration and the new president continue with the current approach or will we see a reversal to Bush-era policies like a pendulum swinging back and forth between these two different political schools of thought? Will a new hybrid emerge that draws a new path for the US in this complicated and troubled part of the world? Only time, and events on the ground, will tell.

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