

# **THE POLITICAL ROAD TO WAR WITH IRAQ**

**Bush, 9/11 and the drive  
to overthrow Saddam**

**Nick Ritchie and Paul Rogers**



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# THE POLITICAL ROAD TO WAR WITH IRAQ

Was the 2003 war with Iraq inevitable? *The Political Road to War with Iraq* explores in close detail the events and factors leading up to the second Gulf War and considers whether the conflict was unavoidable.

This volume begins by setting the story of Iraq, Bush and 9/11 within the broader context of the importance of the Persian Gulf to US national security interests. It then examines US policy toward Iraq at the end of the Clinton administration, the growing opposition of conservative think-tanks to Clinton's strategy of containment and the evolution of Iraq policy during the first eight months of the Bush presidency. In the second part of the book, the authors explore the immediate focus on Iraq after the attacks of September 11, which marked a watershed in US national security policy, and chart the construction of the case against Iraq through 2002 and the Bush administration's determination to end Saddam Hussein's regime at all costs. The volume concludes with a step back to look at the impact of neo-conservatism on the Bush administration's Iraq policy and the decision to go to war, and questions the fact that 'neo-cons' are said to have hijacked the administration's policy.

This book will be of great interest to all students and scholars of US foreign policy, war and peace studies and international relations.

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NICK RITCHIE WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE  
THIS BOOK TO HIS WIFE, SALLY





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# ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile (Treaty)
AEI	American Enterprise Institute
ANO	Abu Nidal Organization
CBW	chemical and biological weapons
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINC	Commander in Chief
CSP	Center for Security Policy
CTEG	Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group
CW	chemical weapons
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DPG	Defense Planning Guidance
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ILA	Iraq Liberation Act
INC	Iraqi National Congress
JINSA	Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs
JRDTF	Joint Rapid Deployment Task Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NESA	Near East and South Asia
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NRO	National Reconnaissance Officer
NSA	National Security Agency
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAPEC	Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSP	Office of Special Plans
PLF	Palestine Liberation Front
PNAC	Project for a New American Century
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's (Emergency) Fund

## ABBREVIATIONS

UNMOVIC	United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission
WHIG	White House Iraq Group
WINEP	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

# INTRODUCTION

After the attacks of 11 September 2001 ('9/11'), the Bush administration deliberated over its response. The immediate reaction was to focus on the organisation that was presumed to be directly responsible for the attacks, the al-Qaida movement, as well as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that was seen as the guardian if not the sponsor of that movement.

By early 2002, the Taliban regime had been terminated and the paramilitaries in Afghanistan that had owed allegiance to Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida movement had been largely dispersed, and the Bush administration moved on. In January 2002, President Bush delivered his State of the Union Address which introduced the concept of an 'axis of evil' of 'rogue' states. These were defined as those that sponsored terrorism, with the greatest danger being seen to come from those that were developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the three key members of the axis being North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

Shortly after the State of the Union Address, Mr Bush gave his West Point speech which developed the theme of pre-empting future threats to US security. This came at a time of much discussion in Washington concerning the need to deal with the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. While the views of most independent security analysts and political commentators during 2002 was that a full-scale war with Iraq was unlikely, there was already abundant evidence that a considerable weight of political opinion had moved in the direction of war.

This book is concerned with that phenomenon and its role in the political road to war. It argues, in particular, that a detailed examination of the political record demonstrates that war with Iraq was all but inevitable after the 9/11 attacks, exploring this in relation to a number of trends.

First, towards the end of the Clinton administration, over the period 1998–2000, Congressional leaders, future members of the Bush administration and the Clinton administration's conservative critics all insisted that the existing policy of containment of Iraq was failing, and that regime change was the only realistic solution to the problem of the Saddam Hussein regime and its ambition to develop and deploy WMD.

Second, following the presidential election of November 2000, but before the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration had already begun to review Iraq policy as

a priority. Given the calls from senior members of the administration and supporters in Congress and think-tanks for regime change, the administration was likely to adopt a far more aggressive and confrontational policy towards Iraq. This would include, at the very least, full implementation of the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, and might possibly extend to even more forceful action.

Third, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, regime change in Iraq became a strategic priority for the administration, following the destruction of the al-Qaida infrastructure in Afghanistan and the elimination of its Taliban host. Moreover, this led on to the construction of a post-9/11 security paradigm that placed Iraq at the centre of the global war on terror. This rapidly evolved into the dominant view in key parts of the administration that Iraq had extensive WMD programmes and a concrete relationship with al-Qaida. Experience had shown that it could not otherwise be contained and a pre-emptive attack aimed at regime termination was now the necessary policy.

Finally, the administration's determination to confront the Saddam Hussein regime was enhanced by strong support in Congress and by the near certainty that the regime would not offer responses sufficient to avert war.

It is relatively easy with hindsight and the benefit of the historical record to construct a linear argument to somehow prove that a government's intentions at time A would inevitably lead to actions at time B, based on the selective presentation of government statements and other evidence. This analysis does not intend to prove that war was inevitable or that the entire course of events that led to the war in Iraq and the wider prosecution of the war on terrorism was predictable.

What it seeks to do is to set out the case that the paradigm constructed by the Bush administration shortly after 9/11 was highly likely to lead to a limited range of outcomes regarding Iraq, with military-led regime change the most probable, if not inevitable, given the administration's vehement criticism of Clinton's containment strategy and the fact that it was already determined to take a more aggressive stand against the regime before the 9/11 attacks. 'Inevitability' here is a subjective judgement, rather than a suggestion of an objectively preordained sequence of events. The extent to which this paradigm was constructed with the *deliberate and unequivocal intention* of forcibly removing the Saddam Hussein regime is a different question and open to debate.

More generally, one can make a robust case, not least from the evidence analysed here, that the broad parameters of the post-9/11 paradigm, with its emphasis on military force, the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular, and countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction, were foreseeable. They were based on the central elements of the neo-conservative and assertive nationalist worldviews that characterised the Bush administration, particularly the experiences and views of some of its most senior and influential members and those of its supporters in Congress and in Washington's conservative national security think-tanks.

Looking back on the development of this paradigm some three years after the start of the Iraq War, two aspects of its longer-term significance are apparent.

## INTRODUCTION

One is that it was sufficiently robust for there to be little doubt that the Saddam Hussein regime would not survive, but second, and perhaps more significantly, it has been sufficiently robust for there to have been little or no further development of the paradigm since the start of the Iraq War in 2003. This is in spite of the manifest problems facing the United States, not just in Iraq where the insurgency is about to enter its fourth year, but in Afghanistan and quite possibly Iran too. In seeking to explore in some depth the political road to war with Iraq we therefore hope that this book might help illuminate the foundations of this paradigm and explain its resilience in the face of adversity.

Finally, this analysis is based in large part on an exhaustive review of statements made by senior members of the administration and Congress and other key figures. The nature of a book such as this necessitates a degree of selectivity; we are, after all, presenting a case. But the analysis quotes many of these statements, sometimes at length and referenced with direct URLs to enable the reader to have access to the full source.

Nick Ritchie and Paul Rogers  
February 2006



