



University of Brasília
Institute of International Relations

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Understanding the Islamic State Insurgency: the origins of the organization and the role of the U.S. policy of exporting democracy

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Dissertation presented to the Institute of International Relations in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

Advisor: Prof. Maria Helena de Castro Santos, Ph.D

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You see these dictators on their pedestals, surrounded by the bayonets of their soldiers and the truncheons of their police ... yet in their hearts there is unspoken fear. They are afraid of words and thoughts: words spoken abroad, thoughts stirring at home -- all the more powerful because forbidden -- terrify them. A little mouse of thought appears in the room, and even the mightiest potentates are thrown into panic.

— Winston S. Churchill, *Blood, Sweat and Tears*

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - Democracy, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the Exporting of Democracy as an American National Interest	5
1.1 The theoretical framework of Democracy	5
1.2 The Third Wave of Democracy and its constraints: does democracy really suit every nation?	7
1.3 The Democratization Process: the role of external factors and the policy of exporting democracy.....	9
1.4 The literature on Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC)	12
Chapter 2 – The American Foreign Policy in the post-Cold War Period	18
2.1 The pillars of the U.S. foreign policy doctrine	18
2.2 The Bush Administration.....	20
2.3 Barack H. Obama administration.....	22
2.3.1 Obama’s Foreign Policy: Worldwide support for U.S. against ISIL	24
Chapter 3 - Safeguarding the American way of live: the U.S. intervention in Iraq and the imposition of democracy	26
3.1 The case of Iraq and the outcomes of the American intervention: the collapse of the Ba’athist central authority.....	26
3.2 The attempt to reconstruct a devastated country.....	30
3.3 The silent transformations in a brittle society: the deepening of rifts in Iraq	31
3.4 The relation of Iraqi sectarian groups to the American invasion.....	33
Chapter 4 - Anatomy of the Iraqi Insurgency and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (I.S./ISIL/ISIS)	35
4.1 The first rumblings of the insurgency	35
4.2 The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – first considerations	37
4.3 The Syrian Uprising and its connection to ISIL	41
4.4 The current situation	42
Chapter 5 - ISIL’s historical and political background and America’s role in its insurgency	44
5.1 Interpreting the rise of I.S.	44
5.2 The Ba’athist heritage	44
5.3 Preliminary Conclusions	48
Conclusion: to what extent is America involved in I.S. insurgency?	50
References	54
Appendices	62

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 - Global support for U.S. Actions against ISIL.....	24
Figure 2 - Timeline – ISIL’s Trajectory	43
Figure 3 - ISIL’s anatomy and goals.....	48
Figure 4 - Iraq’s demographic map.....	52

List of Abbreviations

CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
FIRC	Foreign-Imposed Regime Change
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
IIA	Interim Iraqi Authority
I.S.	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
OAS	Organization of the American States
ORHA	Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance
SCIRI	Security Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

Abstract

Despite the vast research accomplished by scholars and international media, little is known about the interconnectivity among the events believed to have given momentum to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Studies developed on this issue have predominantly focused their efforts on finding explanations only in the post-American invasion in Iraq (2003). This study upholds, on the contrary, that the U.S. presence in the region is just half of the explanation. The other part of the answer lies on both countries' domestic variables. Iraq and Syria, ISIL's birthplaces, share a complex ethno-religious mosaic as well as political similarities that, according to this paper, are significant aspects to comprehend ISIL's upsurge. Thus, the chief aim of this dissertation is to couple both domestic and external variables in order to find why the American intervention was so critical to these countries and how it ignited ISIL. For this assignment, it is going to be privileged the literature of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC) and the literature on the American Foreign Policy. These are two valuable theoretical assets to understand the U.S. position towards exporting democracy abroad as well as the American interventionist path in the post-Cold War era. At first, this dissertation introduces a discussion on the intervention in Iraq and the outcomes that resulted from it. Then, it proceeds to an analysis of the Islamic State itself and the Iraqi and Syrian dictatorial past. The findings of this work stress that the type of government presented in both countries, the Ba'athist, generated numerous social, economic and political disruptions within Iraqi and Syrian societies. Those aspects caused the American FIRC to fail and, like a "perfect storm", created a propitious environment for the rise of the Islamic State.

Keywords: ISIL; democracy; Iraq; Syria; U.S. foreign policy; dictatorship; exporting of democracy; military intervention.

**To dad, the one to whom I owe my physical resilience, spiritual
stubbornness and intellectual disquietude**

Introduction

Under what conditions may governments turn democratic? At first glance, this question seems quite rudimentary and minimal, considering that today's international scenario congregates a massive number of democratic regimes – both electoral and liberal democracies¹. However, one must bear in mind that it was not always like that. Democracies are essentially a Western heritage. In fact, by the time the Third Wave of democracy began, in 1974, there were about 40 democracies in the world – few of which laid outside the West (DIAMOND, 2010). A significant rise in the number of democratic governments occurred only between 1990 and 1995, when the number of electoral democracies in the world shifted from 76 to 117 – three in every five nations in the world (DIAMOND, 2010). In 2014, this number amounted to 125 of 195 countries in the world – a total of 64%.

Meanwhile, it suffices to say that there is a broad framework dedicated to the aspects believed to develop a democratic government. Still, this literature lacks consensus. The academic debate continues and the answers diverge depending on the author's perspective. Martin Seymour Lipset writings (1960), for example, uphold that a country's economic and social background conditions are core assets in the rise and maintenance of democracy. Ernest Barker (1942), on the other hand, stresses the need for consensus² in societal issues as the basis of a stable democratic regime. This synthesis is just a fraction of the theoretical discussion within this field of study. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this essay, it suits our needs. The concepts about the economic and social pre-conditions as well as the common belief, consensus, by a society in certain mores are fundamental tools that help enlightening the case here investigated. They do so because the object studied in this paper involves, among other factors, a failed attempt to erect a democratic regime in an authoritarian state.

There is a vast literature that analyzes the process of democratization in dictatorial, authoritarian, regimes. Here, it is going to be privileged one aspect of this process: the imposition of democracy by a foreign state into another.

The United States has been the country which most resorted to this strategy. It has participated, indeed, in the overthrow of at least twenty-one leaders in the last two centuries³ (DOWNES, 2010) and has attempted to implant democratic governments in a number of countries. Two examples of leaders and authoritarian states targeted by the U.S. are Mullah Omar – in Afghanistan –, and Saddam Hussein – in Iraq. Both cases achieved wide international attention in recent years. These interventions were a prompt response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th in the U.S. homeland. By that time, the Bush Doctrine, a mechanism created to inhibit the efforts of the so-

¹ Summing up, electoral democracies are systems that have already gone through the transition into democratic regimes, encompassing regular elections. Nevertheless, they do not possess the characteristics of liberal democracies, such as political liberties and civil rights, according to Robert Dahl (1973).

² Ernest Barker defines "consensus" as the common belief in certain fundamentals.

³ Although not directly connected to the imposition of democracy, the overthrow of a leader, according to the theory of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC), is an essential part in achieving the democratization of a country.

called rogue states, defended the policy of exporting democracy into those countries as a way to safeguard America's security and national interests.

After thirteen years since the 2001 attacks, the world has witnessed the outbreak of terrorist assaults with far more bellicose power than those of Al-Qaeda. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS/I.S.) had its "boom" in mid-2014 with direct attacks to citizens from selected countries and the massive conquest and disruption of parts of the Middle East – chiefly the Iraqi and, later, the Syrian territory. ISIL's path of destruction is widely known thanks to the assiduous work of international media and scholars. What still lacks investigation, however, is the question about the organization's roots. It is believed that the existence of disruptions in the region, preceding the American intervention of Iraq in 2003, is one of the reasons for ISIL's rise. The other explanations would be the disastrous imposition of democracy during the American intervention in Iraq, 2003, and the Syrian uprising, in 2011. These two events have revealed, as Matthieu Rey puts it, "the silent transformations at work under authoritarian regimes" (REY, 2015, p. 4). Rey's statement sheds light in a part of ISIL's origins that only recently, from the end of 2014 to the first half of 2015, received some effort by theorists. Accordingly, the region's autocratic and military past should be investigated in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the rise of the Islamic State. Summing up the idea here introduced, the question on ISIL's roots involves connections between two variables: the previous political, economic and social background in both countries (Iraq and Syria) and the U.S. imposition of democracy to Iraq – ISIL's first birthplace.

According to authors skeptical about the possibility of implanting a democratic government by means of force, such as Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006), the exacerbated creed that democracy could be implanted anywhere caused the U.S. to stumble across turbulent moments – i.e. the forceful and unsuccessful imposition of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, U.S. policy decision makers, due to principles that lie in the American Liberal Tradition, do tend to magnify democracy's capability to achieve world order – even by means of force –, no matter how adverse the situation in a determined country may be. Castro Santos (2010) points out that Americans think of their democratic liberal values as universal, which would justify their spread to all other nations.

Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006), against the odds of American policy decision makers, stress that the imposition of democracy by means of force has little chances of achieving its goal. Rather, it may only spread symbolic trappings of what a real democratic system encompasses. The result of such maneuver would be a system lacking full representation, civil rights, and political liberties.

Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate Iraq and Syria's statuses quo ante – both state's political and societal background before the intervention of Iraq by the United States – and how those aspects have changed after the intervener arrived. It should be given attention to this change due to the fact that the U.S intervention in Iraq caused a

tremendous turbulence in the country's status quo. Only then, it will be possible to conclude to what extent the imposition of democracy in Iraq played a decisive role in ISIL's upsurge and what are the exact origins of the organization.

This study will be based on the literature of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC). This vein of the literature of exporting of democracy is rather focused on the quality of regimes imposed by means of force. Through a quantitative methodology of analysis, the FIRC investigates cases of success and failure in exporting democracy and identifies the variables responsible for the **few cases of success**. Those variables are, namely: (i) ethno-religious homogeneity; (ii) high levels of prosperity – economically speaking (GDP) –; (iii) previous experience with democratic rule; and the (iv) active participation of the intervener in fostering the construction of democratic institutions. After the appreciation of the results of this literature, it is required to test its findings through a case study – which consists of a thorough and qualitative method of analyzing complex causal relations and allows the researcher to focus on a contemporary phenomenon in its own context (YIN, 2003).

It will be used, therefore, the FIRC approach to analyze the case studies of the main states related to ISIL's insurgency: Iraq and Syria. The former is going to be privileged, initially, because it was the first country to be in touch with ISIL and it constitutes a recent example of the policy of exporting of democracy by the United States. Moreover, Iraq is a practical evidence of the Bush Doctrine: unlike the invasion in Afghanistan, Bush did not justify the intervention in Iraq with the aim to search for Washington and New York attackers. He intended to initiate a global war on terrorism by targeting countries that were believed to fund terrorist organizations, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq. As for Syria, Obama's policy starting with the Arab Spring and the insurgent movements against Assad should be examined as a potential cause for ISIL's migration into Syrian territory. It must be remembered that Syria shares a plethora of social and political similarities with Iraq. So, ISIL's takeover of certain fraction of the Syrian territory should not come as surprise.

After the foregoing considerations, it should be highlighted that the hypothesis of this study is that the economic, cultural and social disruptions, understood as a heritage from the Ba'athist military dictatorship of both countries, explain part of the Islamic State's rise. The other half of the explanation would be the U.S. intervention, which served as a catalyst tool that increased the odds of ISIL achieving full power in the Middle East. It is also worthy stating that this essay does not engage in a comparative study on both countries. It involves, rather, a systematic examination on the political and social phenomena, and their causal effects, that led to ISIL's insurgency. Thus, this study also resorts to the use of the process tracing method, which is an effective tool of qualitative analysis that allows the drawing of descriptive and causal inferences (COLLIER, 2011).

With regards to the disposition of information in this study, the first chapter introduces the reader to the basic, yet crucial, definition of democracy as well as how

this type of regime spread in the course of time. It also underlines the role of the external variables in the democratization process.

Chapter two is responsible for introducing a thorough explanation of the U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War administrations – encompassing the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations.

Chapter three encompasses an in-depth and brief analysis on the American invasion in Iraq. It also analyzes the intersocietal relations between the different groups in Iraq and the relation of these groups towards the American military intervention.

The fourth chapter presents an anatomy of the insurgence of the Islamic State: (i) it starts with an explanation on the first rumblings of discontent about the new institutionalization of Iraq by the Americans; (ii) then it permeates the insurgency of the Islamic State and its connection to the Syrian civil war; (iii) and, lastly, (iv) it presents a brief update on the situation of the conflict at the end of 2015.

The final chapter brings a thorough explanation on the historical and political background of Iraq and Syria: from the Ottoman past to the Ba'athist regime. Then, it underlines how and which variables played a key role in ISIL's insurgency after the U.S. invasion in Iraq.

1.1 The theoretical framework of Democracy

The classical theory of democracy defends the very existence of a “common good” within a society. That term is defined as the beacon of policy and implies that every person has the same or similar ambitions as everyone else. The common good, according to that doctrine, would be clearly conceivable to “any rational person who lacks ignorance and anti-social interests” (SCHUMPETER, 1943, p. 273). The general arrangement of democracy would be defined, then, as it follows: decisions are taken by elected individuals – with special aptitudes and techniques – whose main and only purpose is the implementation of the common good.

Schumpeter (1943) denies this classical concept of democracy. Accordingly, he fosters that there is no such thing as a common good that all people could possibly agree upon by the force of a rational argument. He argues that this assumption is doomed to error due to the fact that individuals, and even groups within a society, have different concepts of what common good is⁴. Hence, since the idea of a common good discernible to all is rejected, the existence of the *volonté general* (will of the people) is likewise neglected; thus, both pillars of the classical doctrine of democracy crumble down.

The author provides an alternative theory, one that he labels as an improvement of the theory of the democratic process. Thereby, Schumpeter defends that the election of representatives must not be a secondary step, as it is stated by the classical approach. Inversely, he proposes that the representatives should play a more decisive role, since “they are the ones to vest the power of political decision” (SCHUMPETER, 1943, p. 269). On that account, those representatives, in order to act on behalf of the people, ought to struggle to obtain the electorate’s vote; the individuals, in their turn, should stand for those representatives who better express their will. Consequently, there is no common good, but a plethora of individual volitions. It is readily perceptible, thus, that the representative does not cope with a will “of the people”; rather, she/he is held responsible for listening to the will “of the majority” (SCHUMPETER, 1943, p. 272). The latter is an example of what the former fails to represent.

Furthermore, Schumpeter sees democracy as a mean, not an end *per se*. The democratic arrangement is a political method aimed to achieve a political decision (legislative or administrative). The electorate must produce a government, composed of high-qualified individuals, whose final duty is to apply decisions. This body of representatives, ergo, should be conducted to the cabinet/parliament through free and

⁴ With regards to the rational argument, Schumpeter emphasizes that ultimate values, such as conceptions of what life and society should be, are beyond logical argument.

competitive elections so as to fit in the pre-requisites of the Schumpeterian minimalist concept, also known as “minimum procedural definition”, of democracy⁵.

Robert Dahl, another prestigious scholar of the democratic process, calls attention to the characteristics that a democratic regime must uphold in order to be recognized as such. Accordingly, he underlines that the main feature of a democracy is the responsiveness of the government before its citizens’ preferences. Dahl’s theory says that a key asset of democratic governments is that they regard their citizens as political equals. This means that the citizens must have the opportunity to “(i) formulate their preferences, (ii) signify their preferences to their fellow nationals and the government by individual and collective action, and (iii) have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of government” (SØRENSEN, 2008 p. 13). As of a condition for those opportunities to be fulfilled, Dahl emphasizes that the agencies and institutions within a political society ought to meet eight guarantees, namely:

1. Freedom to form and join organizations;
2. Freedom of expression;
3. Right to vote;
4. Right of political leaders to compete for support;
5. Alternative sources of information;
6. Free and fair elections;
7. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference (DAHL, 1973, p. 8).

By scrutinizing those eight guarantees in a theoretical scale, Dahl formulates what he calls the two dimensions of democratization: public contestation (liberalization) and inclusiveness (participation). The extent to which each one of these dimensions are combined generates the four types of regimes pointed out by the author: closed hegemonies (no public contestation and participation); competitive oligarchies (greater liberalization to specific groups within the regime); inclusive hegemonies (increased levels of participation, popularization); and polyarchies (greater public contestation and participation).

Dahl uses the term “polyarchy” due to his belief that a full democratic regime involves more than those two dimensions. Besides, he is skeptical about the existence in the real world of a government fully democratized. Thus, he argues that the term “polyarchy” is a more accurate description than “democracy” when it comes to describe most countries considered to hold a democratic regime.

The “procedural minimum definition” – Schumpeter’s electoral democracy – and Dahl’s liberal democracy will suffice to the development of the subsequent ideas. The amalgamation of both authors’ ideas reflects on the following definition of democracy

⁵ Schumpeter defines democracy as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”(SCHUMPETER, 1943, p. 269).

(accepted by most of the scholars in the literature of democratization): (i) free and fair elections, as stated by Schumpeter, in which (ii) civil rights and (iii) political liberties are safeguarded, according to Dahl's institutional guarantees (CASTRO SANTOS, 2001).

Accordingly, Dahl advances Schumpeter's theory by proposing broader concepts than just simply elections. Dahl's contribution, moreover, has become a common basis for standard empirical measures, such as those used by institutions like Freedom House and Polity IV.

The three guiding aspects aforementioned are the minimum pre-requisites of a democratic regime. It is acknowledged, however, that there are other approaches on this framework – the number of pre-requisites and their depth can be exponentially modified, for example, depending on the author's concepts about the democratic system and its requirements⁶. Since furthering this discussion is not the main core of this work, the three axes of the Schumpeter-Dahl approach will suit us satisfactorily.

1.2 The Third Wave of Democracy and its constraints: does democracy really suit every nation?

Since 1974, a considerable amount of nations have transitioned into democratic regimes around the world. Chief among the events that characterized this phenomenon was the Carnation Revolution, in Portugal, part of a chain of episodes that ignited an unprecedented domino effect towards democracy. Democracy's Third Wave⁷, as the set of events that began in 1974 was named, reached every continent in a proportion significantly bigger than the two previous waves (CASTRO SANTOS, 2001, p. 730). In fact, the third wave of democratization achieved a number of at least 30 states migrating into democratic-based governments between 1974 and 1990. By 1995, there were 117 electoral democracies in the world (DIAMOND, 2010, p. 93), including those in Latin America, which have transitioned in the 1980s (HUNTINGTON, 1991, p. 13), and some Eastern European countries, whose shift began in the 1990s (ÁGH, 1991, p. 139).

Despite the democratic path taken by the several states in the regions aforementioned, it still remains an odd fact: some countries have never fully been functioning constitutional democracies. Larry Diamond, a scholar of comparative democratization, points out that in most of the regions of the world there is a

⁶ Schmitter and Karl (1991) provide an example of an attempt to advance the minimum procedural definition. Based on the experience of Latin American countries, in the 1980's, the authors add another attribute to the Schumpeterian minimalist concept: the self-governing of the polity. They assert that a government "must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system" (SCHMITTER; KARL, 1991, p. 82). Moreover, they state that different components produce different democracies – which are not a continuum point, but a matrix of potential variations differently democratic.

⁷ The term Third Wave, coined by Samuel Huntington in his book "The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century" (1991), corresponds to the democratic transitions occurred between 1974 and 1990.

significant number of democracies, except in one: the Arab world. He points out that “the continuing absence of even a single democratic regime in the Arab world is a striking anomaly” (DIAMOND, 2010, p. 93). Indeed, of all sixteen independent Arab states of the Middle East⁸ and the North of Africa, only Tunisia was considered free according to a report released by Freedom House, in 2015⁹ (DIAMOND, 2010).

The same report mentioned above states that the ratings for the Middle East and North Africa region, in 2015, were the worst in the world (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2015). Syria, a dictatorship plunged into civil war and facing a myriad of terrorism threats by organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIL/ISIS), received the lowest score among all the countries in the last decade.

Larry Diamond (2010) affirms that there are two main external factors that inhibit the consolidation of democracy in the Arab region. The first would be the Arab-Israeli conflict, which hangs in like a permanent scar over Middle East political life. According to the author, this conflict succeeds in diverting public frustration away from corruption and human rights violations propagated by regional governments. The second factor would be the reinforcement of authoritarianism between Arab states themselves, which undermines any chances of solid democratic governments thriving in the region (DIAMOND, 2010, p. 101).

No less important, Huntington’s arguments about cultural differences should also be considered in this analysis. According to his view, distinct cultures propagate differences of value, which are far more complex to appease than conflicts originated from different ideologies or interests (HUNTINGTON, 1996a). Thus, these cultural differences may constrain the advance of liberal democratic regimes into some countries.

Despite Huntington’s (1996a) warnings about a multicultural world unequally receptive to democratic governments and O’Donnell and Schmitter’s (1986) emphasis on the role of transitional openings and domestic factors, the belief in the superiority of democracy has prevailed in the U.S. foreign policy. The American democratic creed shaped the country’s foreign policy in a dramatic way in the post-Cold War era. The statement below presents an example of the U.S. foreign policy in this period:

(...) That is still respected around the world, a value system that has fueled this nation for so many hundreds of years and is fueling so many other nations around the world, a value system that says democracy works and it is not restricted to western cultures or to the United States (Colin Powell, 2004).

⁸ “Middle East” refers to the 19 states of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The Arab world term refers to the 16 countries that share ethnolinguistic similarities: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

⁹ According to the Freedom House’s 2015 report, the one notable exception among the Arab states was Tunisia, which became the first Arab country to achieve the status of free since Lebanon was gripped by civil war 40 years ago. Its transition was due, chiefly, to the Arab Spring, in 2011.

This speech was made by Colin Powell, former U.S. Secretary of State (2001-2005). Powell's statement symbolizes exactly what American decision-makers think of democracy: they believe it can reach every corner of the world, regardless of threats such as different cultures, mores, and fundamentals. This democratic creed is inherited by each and every government of the post-Cold war era and its origins lie in the American Liberal Tradition.

Before exposing the role of the American Liberal Tradition in the U.S. foreign policy of the post-Cold War period, it is necessary to explain how external factors are also pivotal to the understating of the policy of exporting democracy.

1.3 The Democratization Process: the role of external factors and the policy of exporting democracy

The pioneers of the literature of democratic regime changes largely disregarded the role of external factors in their analysis (CASTRO SANTOS, 2010). This first generation of "transitologists" downplayed the importance of external elements in their studies, which were based on South American and Latin American countries (1970s-1980s). Only from 1990 onward, the predominance of external variables became a thriving concept in the literature of exporting of democracy. The 1990s grasped events like the end of the Cold War and the concomitant rise of regime transitions in Eastern and Central European countries. Due to *sui generis* internal and regional circumstances, the democratic transitions in the countries that had previously formed the USSR were quite dissimilar to the experiences in South European and Latin American countries. In fact, unlike the last ones, external stimuli were paramount to the transition of former communist countries.

The transitions of former Soviet Republics have shed light not only on a plethora of subnational and local aspects, but also on the importance of external factors in the transitions of countries with weak "stateness". The reunification of Germany, the split of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and the reaffirmation of the Baltic States were representative of this necessity to add more variables in the field of study. As Whitehead (2005) suggests:

It is rare to come across an instance of democratization in a single country where no substantial neighborhood effects are evident. Most democratization processes occur in clusters (Peru-Argentina-Uruguay-Brazil-Chile-Paraguay; Poland-Hungary-Czechoslovakia-East Germany; or Nicaragua-El Salvador-Guatemala). This strongly suggests that external factors must be playing a coordinating role (WHITEHEAD, 2005, p. 12).

According to Whitehead (2005), the transitions of communist countries are examples of when "international factors can be expected to play a stronger and more directive

role in democratization” (WHITEHEAD, 2005, p.6). The author says that the first generation of the literature was keen on affirming the prominence of internal variables over external ones in virtue of its case studies: the democratic processes in the 1970s and 1980s, period analyzed by first generation authors, were characterized by transitions inside the borders of Westphalian-consolidated states (WHITEHEAD, 2005). In a brief comparison, South European (1970s) and Latin American countries (1980s) had a much more resilient social political framework than those inherent to Eastern European states by the time they were still encompassed, or about to leave, the Soviet Union¹⁰.

O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) believe that power and coercion have been the most common assets through which an authoritarian state has begun to transition – leaving little room for consent and influence from neighboring states. According to the authors, “the factor that most probabilistic assured a democratic outcome to the transition was the occupation by a foreign power which was itself a democracy” (O’DONNELL; SCHMITTER, 1986, p.18). In addition, they affirm that the external intervention will be successful only if it done during the democratic consolidation, rather than in the transition between the authoritarian and the new regime. This is due to the unpredictability of the transition process itself, which may hinder external actions from achieving their outcome: effective democracy.

Taken as an independent variable, the exporting of democracy is just one of the elements of the democratization process. Nonetheless, believing in its effectiveness is of great importance because “this is an academic backup for the [American] foreign and defense policy decision-makers who choose to export democracy by the use of force” (CASTRO SANTOS; TAVARES TEIXEIRA, 2014, p. 12).

As a response to the 09/11 terrorist attacks, democracy has been placed at the core of U.S. foreign policy as a way of safeguarding America’s security and interests – both domestic and international. When it comes to promoting its values worldwide, the United States has been utilizing its democratic rhetoric through several channels: cultural diplomacy, monitoring of elections, economic embargoes, political sanctions, requirements for nations to be part of international development organizations, and the very use of force. Castro Santos (2010) states that the promotion of democracy through the use of force is the most difficult way to be justified. However, the use of force is a strategy that has been widely used in the peacekeeping operations starting in the 1990s and in the subsequent American invasions to the Middle East.

Tom Farer (1996) corroborates the belief on the role of external factors by assuming that those can contribute to the defense and strengthening of democracy worldwide. Farer develops his view on the assumption that there is a shrinking of sovereignty’s prerogatives. The author defends that “while the practical necessities of

¹⁰ Castro Santos (2010) affirms that there are two types of foreign-imposed democracy through a military defeat: “countries with a strong state apparatus (Portugal, Greece and Argentina, or example); and (ii) with countries with a weak state apparatus, external vulnerabilities, and lacking full autonomy, sovereignty or foreign acknowledgment (CASTRO SANTOS, 2010, p. 17, apud WHITEHEAD, 2005).

interdependence eroded sovereignty from one side, the reality of power differentials hammered it from the other” (FARER, 1996, p. 6). This is a post-World War II rationale endorsed by two post conflict charters: the United Nations¹¹ (1945) and the Organization of American States (1948). Besides, the author also points out to the legitimation of humanitarian interventions, which is supported by the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols on humanitarian law¹².

Castro Santos reminds us that, based on the Kantian principle of democratic peace, “threats to democracy are conceived as threats to collective security and, in order to defend it, interventions are legal and supported by the OAS charter, prescribed in the Declaration of Santiago, UN, July 1991” (CASTRO SANTOS, 2010, p. 16).

In his *Clash of Civilizations* (1996a), Huntington shows himself not as enthusiastic as other authors about the positive role of the external factors. He, while studying the cultural factor as independent variable of the democratization process, stresses out the incompatibility of some cultures with the Western democratic ideal.

Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures. Western efforts to propagate such ideas produce instead a reaction against "human rights imperialism" and a reaffirmation of indigenous values, as can be seen in the support for religious fundamentalism by the younger generation in non-Western cultures (HUNTINGTON, 1996, pp. 40-41).

Therefore, Huntington is often referred to when it comes to the events of September 11 and its aftermath. It is suggested that the episode indicates that Huntington was right: “conflict between groups from differing civilizations would be the central and most dangerous dimension of the emerging global politics” (HUNTINGTON, 1996a, p. 25). When specifically speaking of the relation Islam-West, the author highlights that the tolerance between each other crumbled with the fall of the Soviet Union (1980s-1990s). “The collapse of communism removed a common enemy of the West and Islam and left each the perceived major threat to the other” (HUNTINGTON, 1996a, p. 211). The increase in the contact between Westerners and Muslim caused them to develop a sharper sense of their own identity how it differs from that of the opposite. Thus, the reasons of the renewed conflict between the West and the Islam lie in a relation of power and culture.

In a nutshell, despite the lack of consensus when it comes to the positive or negative influence of external variables in the literature of democratization, one can affirm that,

¹¹ In the Chapter VII of UN’s charter, article 51 recognizes a single exception for "individual or collective self-defense" against an armed attack. The drafters provided a mechanism for collective response to acts of aggression.

¹² The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols form the core of international humanitarian law. They are international treaties that contain the most important rules limiting the barbarity of war. They protect people who do not take part in the fighting (civilians, medics, aid workers) and those who can no longer fight –wounded, sick and shipwrecked troops, prisoners of war (INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, 2010).

starting from the former communist nations in the 1990s, there has been an increase in the acceptance of the importance of the external factors in crafting democracy.

After discussing the importance of external factors to the successful implantation of democracy, there still remains a missing part to be discussed: the quality and stability of the imposed regime. Next session is dedicated, therefore, to the explanation of the Foreign Imposed Regime Change (FIRC) literature and its implications to the process of democratization.

1.4 The literature on Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC)

When one thinks about the challenges of exporting democracy, questions about the effectiveness of military intervention in consolidating democracy and on the self-maintenance ability of imposed institutional reforms are among the first ones to come to mind. In fact, they are, as this chapter will expose, at the core of the theory of democratic FIRCs¹³. This theory aims to advance beyond the simple inquiry of whether or not a democratic system is achievable; it rather focuses on the quality and stability of regimes that are imposed to the target countries by a foreign intervener.

Recent studies have already pointed out that the success in the imposition of democracy is not only unlikely to produce more than shreds of liberalizing effects, but can jeopardize any chances of the target country experiencing full democratic achievements in the subsequent decades (BUENO DE MESQUITA; DOWNS, 2006). This opinion is either corroborated or rejected by other theorists of this literature, as we shall see in a further moment.

The copious quantity of unsuccessful attempts to impose democracy by the use of force have led some scholars to dedicate much effort in the analysis of whether interventions by a foreign state can effectively erect democracy. Therefore, the democratic FIRC literature ascended with a chief aim: to evaluate the regime changes levied from outside and to indicate the variables that explain the success or failure of foreign imposed regimes through quantitative analyses.

With regard to the definition of FIRC, Alexander Downes' (2010) indicates that imposed regime change is characterized by:

(...) the removal of the effective political leader of a state at the behest of the government of another state. Interveners typically also empower a new leader and sometimes impose a set of new

¹³ In this study, the term "FIRC" is solely used to express its democratic variant – Democratic FIRC –, which stands for the imposition of a democratic regime by a foreign country. There are other types of FIRC and their taxonomy can be identified, likewise, by their goal. For example, there are works that analyze the effects of the imposed establishment of autocratic regimes.

institutions, but all that is required for a case to qualify as FIRC is if an external actor displaces the political leader of the target state (DOWNES, 2010, p.5).

Downes further indicates that the vast majority of leaders are ousted by foreign troops itself or with the assistance of domestic rebels. It is interesting to notice that the author draws much more attention to the overthrow of the leader, while neglecting the role of democratic institutions in the rearrangement of the regime. The institutional perspective is, however, considered by other authors' definition of FIRC.

Goran Peic and Dan Reiter (2010) advance in the explanation by providing a place to institutional reform in the democratic imposition maneuver:

The term 'regime' has been used by scholars sometimes to refer to a leader and sometimes to refer to political institutions. Foreign imposed regime change, therefore, can mean an externally imposed change in either leaders or political institutions, though in practice it is often both (PEIC; REITER, 2010, p.454)

Andrew Enterleine and Michael Greig (2008) add to their definition of FIRC – which is specifically developed towards the democratic variety of FIRC –, the role of the foreign intervener on restructuring the domestic scope so that democracy can thrive. As they affirm:

(...) imposed democratic regimes are democratic governments installed by a foreign power in which the foreign power plays an important role in the establishment, promotion, and maintenance of the institutions of government (ENTERLEINE; GREIG, 2008, p.323).

In addition, Enterleine and Greig conclude that “political institutions may be central to an imposer's strategy such as demonstrating the viability of one type of political institution versus another” (ENTERLEINE; GREIG, 2008, p. 884).

Their argument is also based on the belief that the imposition of a political system involves both burdens and fruitful moments. Therefore, they say that while the imposition of a regime demands consistent investment and resources provided by the imposer, its benefits lie in its potential for **self-maintenance**. In other words, the imposition of political institutions should be able to cultivate and support the ascension of leaders, in the target country, whose policy goals are similar to those of the intervener state.

Considering those initial definitions, this dissertation will explore the following definition of democratic FIRC: it involves (i) the expelling of autocratic leaders and/or their respective institutions by means of force from a foreign intervener; (ii) the imposition of a new leader or the restoration of a recently overthrown ruler to office (new leader FIRC versus restoration FIRC); and (iii) the playing by the intervening external actor of an important role in the establishment, promotion and

maintenance of a new democratic political system in the target state (CASTRO SANTOS; TAVARES TEIXEIRA, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Accordingly, the imposition of a regime by a foreign actor does not imply that the intervener state has no obligations towards the target country. This assertion is useful to remind us of the main objective of the FIRC: imposition of a new regime (in this case, a democratic one) while enabling the target state to enjoy its sovereignty. This suggests, consequently, that the intervener's troops – its military contingent – must be withdrawn after the completion of regime change; otherwise, the situation would be characterized as a territorial annexation or a decolonization process (WILLARD, 2011).

With regard to the role of external variables, chief of them are the restoration of a previously overthrown leader and the imposition of a new one. Downes (2010) points out that both are separate varieties that lead to different outcomes. The first, restoration of a new leader, has the aim of bringing back the status quo *ante*. A few examples of restoration occurred at the end of the World War II, as Nazi regimes were ousted by the Allies in France, for example, and the Soviet Union intervened in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) in order to reverse a liberalization wave and restore a pro-communist (and pro-Soviet) trend.

The second variable corresponds to a more ambitious variety, as it has the final goal of removing the old ruler and bringing a new one to power. Downes affirms that this is the most common type of FIRC that springs to mind when regime change is discussed. The author affirms that externally-imposed leaders are often viewed as illegitimate puppets, serving the interests of foreign masters rather than those of their own people. This was the type of democratic FIRC implemented by the United States in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Downes underlines the riskiness of the new leader FIRC with the following statement:

Whereas restoration FIRC might be characterized as defensive or reactive since it reverses an already accomplished change of leadership that the intervener perceives as threatening or destabilizing, new leader FIRC is inherently offensive or proactive because the goal is to reshape the target's political order (by empowering new elites) in a way that suits the intervener's interests (DOWNES, 2010, p. 7).

He also provides an explanation to the link between an intervener's imposition of a regime and the rise of civil war. The influence of foreign-imposed regime in the likelihood of a domestic strife are considered to lie in greed or opportunity, on one hand, and in grievance or motivation on the other (DOWNES, 2010). Peic and Reiter (2010) state that military interventions can trigger civil strife when they target both political institutions and leadership – affecting the infrastructural power of a state with effects similar to an interstate war. Andrew Enterleine and Michael Greig (2008) also defend this point of view by asserting that foreign-imposed regime change tends to

weaken the power of the state and thereby increasing the opportunity for rebellion.

Downes, by his turn, argues that only a new leader FIRC increases the probability of civil war, given that a restoration FIRC tends to restore a leader that shares political, social and cultural ties with its population (DOWNES, 2010). The new leader imposition tends to create a system of winners and losers – the latter, driven from power by the intervener’s superior bellicose mechanisms, may try to launch an insurgency to regain their previous position. The Iraqi case is an example of this situation. The country had its early core of insurgency structured by the former Ba’ath Party, whose main aim was to return Saddam Hussein to power. After his capture and later execution by the United States, that aim changed into the dislodgement of the Shiite-dominated government (PACKER, 2005, pp. 298-312).

As it was seen, FIRC’s capability of imposing successful democracy is subject to the interpretation of different authors and their consequent beliefs in the issue. With regards to the segmented opinions on this matter, Downes and Monten, recognizing the non-existence of a common ground in the literature, (2013) divide the various scholars into optimists, pessimists, and those lying in between this continuum.

The first ones, so-called optimists, tend to exhort the positive aspects of military interventions. Castro Santos and Tavares Teixeira (2014) remind us that inside the optimist branch figure both foreign and defense policy decision makers. Factors such as poverty, ethnic fractioning or absence of democratic experience in the target countries would be irrelevant, especially if enough time and resources are given to nation-building operations. In fact, some authors of this vein affirm that military interventions are often necessary to remove abusive political and military institutions (BERMEO, 2003). Others qualify this assertion suggesting that military interventions have a positive effect on democratization only if the objective of these interventions is explicitly to democratize the target countries (PECENEY, 1999).

The pessimists view the successes of democracy imposition as outliers from a broader pattern doomed to failure. In other words, they believe that democracy has rare chances to thrive whether it is imposed by means of force. Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006) are among this group. They provide quantitative evidence suggesting that the “democratic goal” in the target countries is not achieved in the ten to twenty years after the intervention. They also found that, whichever be the intervener – a nation-state or an organization (the U.N, for example) – the target country will experience no remarkable increase in democratization.

They also underline that democratic leaders from intervener states are most concerned about their own survival. This means that the democratic nation-building rhetoric used by the interveners is mostly motivated by the maximization of their own political survival. In other words, leaders from democratic countries will only encourage interventions in which they might have a secondary gain other than the provision of a new political-institutional system to another state. Secondary gains can be understood the safeguard of national security or the acquisition of services to a wide range of the

population: increase and variation of energy sources, and protection of trade routes (BUENO DE MESQUITA; DOWNS, 2006, p. 631).

To summarize, the authors defend that the outcome of the FIRC depends on the target country. The lower the democracy score at the outset, the more likely a democratic intervener will raise it modestly and symbolically as compared to states that do not experience intervention. The higher the degree of democracy before an intervention, the bigger the chances that the intervener will foster substantial aspects of democracy – leaving symbolic trappings of a full democratic regime, but no more than that.

Downes and Monten, referring to the previous authors, provide evidence on the difference of the quality of democracy that has been achieved in countries that possessed some domestic factors previous to the intervention. There have been cases in which the intervener has demonstrated few intentions in fully democratizing the target; however, the opposite is also true. Democracy was the main goal in the interventions of West Germany and Japan in the post-World War II period. The authors argue that democratization is more likely to happen, as it was the case of those two countries, in places with increased levels of economic development, an ethnically homogenous population, and where previous experiences with democratic rule occurred (DOWNES; MONTEN, 2013).

Enterleine and Greig (2008) also focus on social and economic aspects of the target countries. They analyzed the sustainability of imposed democracies from 1800 to 1994 and stressed out that 63% of the FIRCs fail to produce a lasting democratic regime, enduring an average age of 13.1 years. They also emphasize domestic variables such as ethno-religious unity and economic prosperity as crucial to a long-lasting regime.

Another conditional variable is the amount of resources and commitment vested in the intervention, which can influence on the success of imposing democracy. James Dobbins et al. (2003) compares cases of U.S. interventions beginning in World War II to prove this hypothesis. He considers as main indicators of the intervener's effort in the nation-building process the number of troops deployed to the region and the amount of economic aid provided. Dobbins highlights the case of the West Germany, where an impressive amount of troops and economic aid was given.

Downes and Monten (2013) tested the majority of the arguments presented by the authors above. They did so by adjusting their research designs in order to avoid any selection bias. The authors found results that foster the three approaches already mentioned of the FIRC literature by analyzing democratic foreign-imposed changes from 1816 to 2008 through the Polity Index. They conclude that, on the average, states that experience democratic FIRCs remain firmly rooted in authoritarian regimes.

Accordingly, while the recent literature on exporting of democracy by the use of force still seems deeply normative and optimistic, the Foreign Imposed Regime Change

(FIRC) literature is rather pessimistic, pointing to very few and specific variables that should be present in the target countries so that democratic interventions could work.

A democratic FIRC, as it has been observed so far, is marked by a costly way of changing another country's political regime by means of force. Thus, inevitably, a key question emerges from this assertive: why impose a polity at all? Liberman (1996) defends that imposing states might seek to enhance their access to material resources by pursuing a policy of conquest, and a new political system might enhance the likelihood of a long-term access to goods stimulating the conquest. Owen (2002) says that major power states are most likely to impose political institutions to other states when international ideological conflict is present. This argument is consistent with Meernik (1996) reasoning that the cultivation of democratic regimes by the United States is driven, foremost, by security interests (both in U.S. homeland and in its regional bases worldwide).

History itself fails to provide clear guidance on the effectiveness of pro-democratic military interventions: for every Germany, Japan, Grenada, and Panama, there is an Afghanistan, Uganda, Cambodia, and Iraq (DOWNES, 2010). Willard (2011) provides a realistic argument on the reasons why a country would opt to impose a democratic regime instead of bargaining to obtain political and economic benefits. She simply addresses that strong countries – understood here, in a realistic rationale, as the ones with a notable bellicose mechanism and strong political power – use FIRC as an easier and alternative way to the coercion and persuasion. In a nutshell, “regime change happens because, when power is asymmetric, war may be cheaper than peace” (WILLARD, 2011, p. 18). Accordingly, a democratic FIRC would be the “middle way” between resorting to the use of force and the dialogue attempt.

From all the above, one can say that low levels of economic development (simply understood by means of GDP) and high levels of ethnic and religious cleavages are likely to inhibit any successful imposition of democracy. This was the case of Iraq when submitted to American intervention, with consequences as far as the later insurgency of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS).

Before analyzing the democratization process by means of force in Iraq – and its role on the rise of an unprecedented threat – it is appropriate to explain the American foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. This will support the understanding of much of the rationale used not only in the Iraq war, but also in other places in the Middle East and elsewhere.

2.1 The pillars of the U.S. foreign policy doctrine

After four decades of bipolar disputes between opposite ideologies, the end of the Cold War represented the triumph of Western liberal values and principles. The American victory over the Soviet bloc was seen as an uncontested proof of the superiority of the American Way of Life. This view was backed up by scholars, such as Fukuyama (1989) and decision makers who were eager to show that democratic values were universal and, therefore, that was the desire of all people to become democracies (CASTRO SANTOS; TEIXEIRA, 2013).

Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History*, a study published in 1989, underlined what he called “the end of history”. In his article, the author was keen on asserting that the demise of the Soviet Union was representative of the acceptance of Western liberal democracy worldwide. Further, by analyzing the characteristics of the international scenario at that time – with no visible threats to the American principles and aspirations (FARER, 1996) – the author affirmed that humanity had achieved the zenith of its evolution, and there was no more space for opposite ideological insurgencies:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, **the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government** (FUKUYAMA, 1989, p. 4).

Barry Buzan (2004) also draws attention to the liberal facets of the American foreign policy:

(...) it is also in the grip of a belief that liberal values are universal, and that the intrinsic moral and practical superiority of liberal values gives the Americans the right to claim the future of mankind. As Patrick (2002, 7) observes, ‘the validity of the country’s liberal principles derives from their presumed universality’ and underpins a missionary element in US foreign policy (BUZAN, 2004, pp. 155-157).

Although Fukuyama’s prospects were not completely accurate, they are useful when it comes to the explanation of the roots of the belief in the American exceptionalism¹⁴. Authors like Buzan (2004), Tocqueville (1945), Lipset (1996) and other scholars also contribute to this literature tradition of the U.S. foreign policy.

¹⁴ Teixeira (2010) provides a thorough analysis of the American exceptionalism.

Back in the 1970s, Robert Packenham (1973), based on the findings of Louis Hartz's¹⁵ (1955), compared the hypotheses highlighted by the scholars of the American exceptionalism and demonstrated that both foreign policy doctrines showed by American Cold War governments and the theories developed by scholars of the political development field shared the same values based on the American Liberal Tradition (CASTRO SANTOS; TAVARES TEIXEIRA, 2014).

Castro Santos (2010a), following Packenham's analyses, believes that it is possible to identify the values of the American liberal tradition both in the democratization theory and in the American policy of exporting democracy in the Post-Cold War.

Accordingly, Castro Santos (2010a) analyzed both quantitative and qualitatively 415 speeches of the first three post-Cold War presidents – George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush – and their respective Secretaries of State and Defense. Castro Santos identified the pillars of the American foreign policy that are used to justify the policies of promotion and exporting of democracy – even by the use of force, which constitutes an extreme aspect of the policy of democratization. She lists three principles and one American mission, namely:

(i) The values and principles of the western liberal democracy are universal, that is, all peoples of the world wish to become democratic. Therefore, the promotion of democracy is for the good of mankind;

(ii) Democracies do not fight each other. Therefore, exporting democracy means to promote regional and even global peace. Here democracy is linked to regional and global peace;

(iii) The promotion of democracy makes the world safer and more prosperous for the United States. Here democracy is linked to the security and the economic interests of the United States.

Mission: Americans think of themselves as having a mission to bring freedom and democracy to mankind (CASTRO SANTOS, 2010a, p 160).

The first principle and the American mission are the ones that most approaches the liberal values. Wrapped up by the Kantian peace, the second principle links liberal values to peace and security. The third principle associates liberal ideological values to American national interests. It is a crucial tenet of the American foreign policy doctrine in the post-Cold War era.

As stressed by Teixeira (2010), those foregoing principles, and mission, points to the homogeneity of the U.S. foreign policy view (TEIXEIRA, 2010, p. 52). Whichever be doctrine used to conduct the American decision makers, the liberal principles that

¹⁵ Packenham's analyses were backed up by the work of Louis Hartz, who had pointed out in *The Liberal Tradition in America* the sources of the American Liberal Tradition.

guide the American foreign policy will always be there. “They are the same since the founding fathers” (CASTRO SANTOS, 2010a, p. 181).

It is important to say that, at least the three first administrations of the post-Cold War period made constant use of the three principles and the American mission identified. However, each administration has put different emphasis on the principles or mission, according to the way the President and his foreign policy team saw the role of the United States in the new international order and the external challenges they had to face.

2.2 The Bush Administration

When George W. Bush was sworn into office, in 2001, he was guided by the belief that his predecessor’s liberal internationalist strategy was no longer appropriate to represent the interests of the American people. Bill Clinton (1993-2001) had largely engaged U.S. foreign policy in missions of nation-building and humanitarian interventions¹⁶ – like the ones in Kosovo, Somalia and Bosnia. The following speech represents a thorough translation of his intentions while supporting this “interventionist doctrine” policy:

It's easy (...) to say that we really have no interests in who lives in this or that valley in Bosnia, or who owns a strip of brushland in the Horn of Africa, or some piece of parched earth by the Jordan River. But the true measure of our interests lies not in how small or distant these places are, or in whether we have trouble pronouncing their names. The question we must ask is, what are the consequences to our security of letting conflicts fester and spread. We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so (CLINTON, William J., 1999).

Clinton’s position towards humanitarian intervention by American foreign policy caused him to lose congressional and the international community’s support. The setbacks involving Clinton’s administration efforts in Somalia and in the former Yugoslavia had negative impact in the American public opinion, which caused the people to become skeptical about the nature and utility of these operations (DOBBINS et al., 2007). The literature on the U.S. interventions during Clinton’s government highlights the non-neutral position of the U.S. military troops during the conflicts, the partiality regarding the choice of places to intervene – U.S. completely

¹⁶ According to Dobbins et al. (2003), since the end of the Cold War the U.S has been engaged in allocating political, military and economic resources in conducting operations both in the aftermath of conflicts or civil turmoil (DOBBINS, 2003, p. 63).

ignored Rwanda's genocide –, and the controversial outcomes of those invasions – countless human lives losses (MILLER CENTER, 2015).

This background has certainly influenced Bush in his decision as to which political agenda he should follow from the moment of his arrival at the White House. Among Bush's several campaign promises, he stated he would be more selective in relation to the use of force, and called for a less interventionist approach with regard to internal affairs of other countries. In addition, he was skeptical of multilateralism and unremitting regarding potential adversaries (CASTRO SANTOS; TEIXEIRA, 2014). This negative opinion towards multilateralism derives from Bush's concern not to undermine U.S. military and strategic power. Thus, the president refrained from recognizing any multilateral approach that might represent a threat to American interests, such as the contentious jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the signing and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Despite the presence of representatives of the neoconservative movement in his cabinet, Bush did not let them exert much influence in his foreign policy doctrine during the first couple of months of 2001. Additionally, some of the former president's closest aides, Condoleeza Rice and Collin Powell, were against idealistic maneuvers in foreign policy issues. Ms. Rice stated during Bush's presidential campaign that the U.S national interests had been replaced with humanitarian interests – or the interests of the international community – during Clinton's government. She added that the creed that the United States only exercises power legitimately when it does so on behalf of someone or something else was deeply rooted in the Wilsonian thought¹⁷, and there were strong echoes of it in the Clinton administration. Condoleeza Rice resumed her foreign policy inclination in the following statement: “to be sure, there is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect” (RICE, 2000, p. 47).

The initial foreign policy background of the Bush administration has undergone a complete change after the September 11th terrorist attacks. In a dramatic review of his grand strategy, Bush decided to adopt a more neoconservative approach, embracing a widespread and rather active foreign policy based on American military power. The interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), although important in themselves, are even more noteworthy as manifestations of this new strategy, which became known as the Bush Doctrine (CASTRO SANTOS, 2014).

Indeed, after the 9/11 attacks, Bush showed eagerness to convince the world that the cultivation of democratic political institutions, coupled with economic prosperity the provision of internal and external security, would give birth to political environments anchored in mutually reinforcing peace, prosperity, and democracy (BUSH, 2003).

¹⁷ The ideas introduced by the U.S. twenty-eighth president are considered to be the origin of the “Wilsonianism” lexicon. The core element of Wilson's thought was that the U.S. foreign policy had the prerogative of promoting the democratic regime abroad in order to achieve peace in the world (IKENBERRY, 1999).

At its zenith, the Bush Doctrine stressed that the only definitive solution to the problem of terrorism and tyranny was the complete democratization of key countries considered to be the birthplace of terrorism. The principles and values of the American democracy, as described by Castro Santos (2010), were not seen as mere ideals, but as effective and pragmatic tools against such threats. The American Liberal Tradition (HARTZ, 1955) once more prevailed; this time, however, it was embodied in a much radical strategy: preemptive war. Only in a democratic environment the United States would be really safe:

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. (...) Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world (BUSH, Inaugural Speech, 2005)

This connection between promoting democracy and assuring America's national security interests is crucial to the understanding of Bush's foreign policy – chiefly when it comes to the interventions in the Middle East. Bush's political view in the post-attacks inaugurates a critical solution to both terrorism threats and the tyrannies that lie behind the curtains: full democratization. The former President initiated a global hunting towards the so-called rogue states, a term used to designate “bad”, “outlaw” states that acted in breach of the peace and the international order.

The Bush Doctrine has caused its own creator to plunge the U.S. domestic and international opinion into a sea of critiques. Bush reached the end of his mandate in 2008 with poor public support. He left his office with two major in Afghanistan and Iraq and a massive amount of troops deployed abroad. All of those ruinous achievements would be inherited by the next administration, which would be responsible for reconciling the world and the American population itself with the image of a peaceful, yet active, U.S. foreign policy.

2.3 Barack H. Obama administration

Since the launching of his presidential campaign in 2008, Obama strived to be recognized as a “step off the pace” in the history of American foreign policy – chiefly when compared to the Bush administration.

After witnessing the demise of his predecessor's rhetoric on the fight against terrorism and on the forceful imposition of democracy, Obama maintained a great distance from

this freedom agenda (CASTRO SANTOS; TEIXEIRA, 2014). He has chosen to put emphasis on the enhancement of people's economic prospects, civil society and, according to Zakaria, his key word – "dignity" (ZAKARIA, 2008).

Fareed Zakaria affirms that Obama seldom expressed his intentions in the same moralistic way of the Bush government. He did not embrace the conception of a world divided into a "good and evil" sort of taxonomy – even when speaking about terrorism. The author states that Obama "sees countries and even extremist groups as complex, motivated by power, greed and fear as much as by pure ideology" (ZAKARIA, 2008).

When it comes to the policy of exporting democracy, Obama's administration is much more reluctant in resorting to the use of force to achieve this goal. It does not mean, however, that he has given up on the ideal of spreading democracy abroad or has neglected the American Liberal Tradition. Castro Santos and Teixeira (2014) prove that, although the president does not mention *ipsis litteris* his intentions to export democracy, he does so by encouraging institutional reforms in the "target countries".

In an attempt to rescue and recover world's belief in the American mission of bringing peaceful order, the President has pointed out the missteps of the previous administration while trying to export democracy at all costs:

I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq (OBAMA, Remarks by the President on a New Beginning, June 4, 2009).

In a speech during the United Nations General Assembly session, Obama reaffirmed that the promotion of democratic governments in other nations has been quite ambivalent in its aims. Nevertheless, although he recognizes that the U.S ways of exporting democracy have encompassed stringent and dubious methods, Obama does not discard the importance of the democratic liberal principles:

Democracy cannot be imposed on any nation from the outside. Each society must search for its own path, and no path is perfect. Each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its people and in its past traditions. And I admit that America has too often been selective in its promotion of democracy. But that does not weaken our commitment; it only reinforces it. There are basic principles that are universal; there are certain truths which are self-evident -- and the United States of America will never waver in our efforts to stand up for the right of people everywhere to determine their own destiny (OBAMA, 2009).

In other words, the President did not get rid of the American liberal values. He just rather focuses on galvanizing the populations into building democracy for themselves.

He still does emphasize democracy's importance in safeguarding the U.S. and the world's peace and security; nonetheless, he prefers to leave the choice of becoming, or not, a full liberal democracy to the individuals of determined countries.

Obama has been, so far, quite honest regarding his inclinations. He seems to be conducting an interest-based foreign policy, rather than Bush's normative value-based one – which was responsible for the interventions in the countries of the “Axis of Evil” (CASTRO SANTOS; TEIXEIRA, 2014). When Obama attempts to address to the violence caused by Islamic extremism, he carefully recognizes and distinguishes the ethnic diversities within the Islamic World – Arabs, Persians, Africans, Sunnis, Shiites, and others – and highlights that each of them have its own agenda and do not think or act on behalf of terrorism in the same way.

In the Middle East region, Obama has achieved some remarkable results. By means of an intense political and strategic agenda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he has succeeded in undermining Al-Qaeda's supremacy in the region – which was notable through Bin Laden's capture and subsequent death in a remote region of Pakistan, in 2011. He has also decreased the number of troops in Afghanistan by 2014 and has completely withdrawn U.S. troops from Iraq, in December 2011.

With regard to the currently situation in Iraq – the alarming expansion of ISIL in the country – some scholars are eager to say that it is due to the early withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region. In 2011 the president announced, after removing American soldiers from Iraqi ground, that the U.S. had left behind “a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant state, with a representative government” (OBAMA, 2011). This idealistic view would begin to crumble in January 2014, with the insurgency of the authority of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and its massive path of destruction left in Iraq and Syria.

2.3.1 Obama's Foreign Policy: Worldwide support for U.S. against ISIL

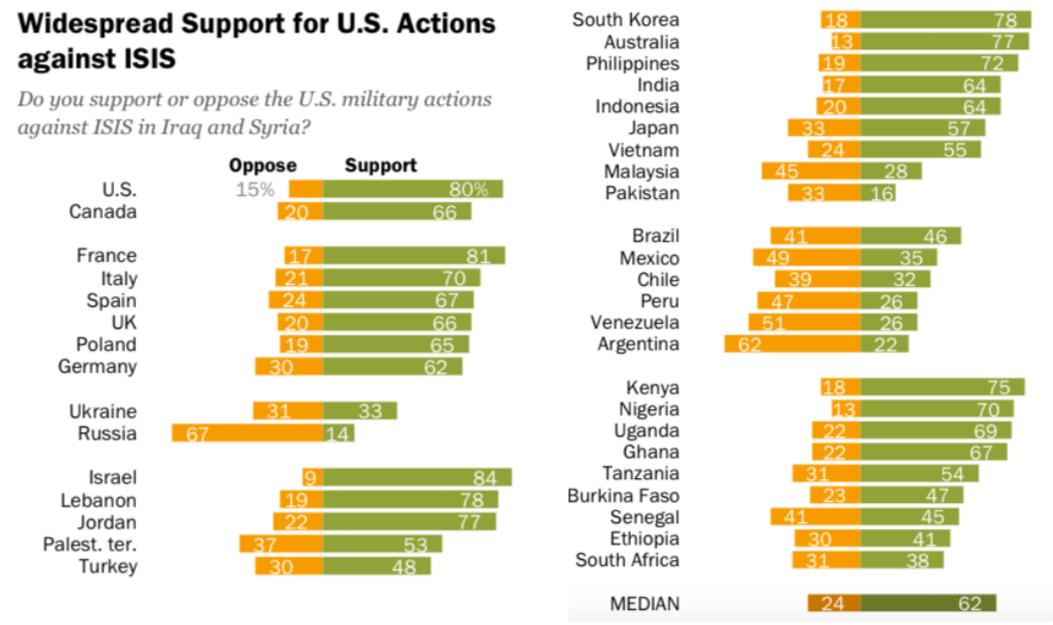
The rise of the Islamic State has generated a wave of concerns in most of the nations around the world – primarily those who have a geographical proximity with the group and the ones that have groups in their societies that share the same ideology of ISIL. President Obama's administration is usually referred as the one that holds substantial responsibility for secluding and detaining Islamic State's onslaught, chiefly considering that the insurgency of the organization was more evident during his term.

The Pew Research Center has provided a survey about the global opinion on Obama's foreign policy towards ISIL. Unlike the case of the Iraq war¹⁸, there seems to be a

¹⁸ The data found and other relevant details can be found in the Pew Research Center's research *A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe ever higher, Muslim anger persists* (2004).

global support for the American military efforts to counter ISIL’s maneuvers. The research center finds that the U.S. airstrikes campaigns in Iraq and Syria are broadly backed by majorities in the United States, Europe, and even endorsed by the great public in key Middle Eastern countries (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015). Figure 1, below, illustrates the results of this survey:

Figure 1: Global support for U.S. Actions against ISIL



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015).

The final percentage found in the survey underlines that there is a vast global support for the American military campaign against ISIS. A median of 62% across the nations polled say they support U.S. efforts against the militant group in Iraq and Syria, while a median of just 24% are opposed.

It is noteworthy that some of the Middle Eastern nations surveyed also support the U.S. campaign, even the countries where the U.S. has engaged in unpopular foreign policy measures. In Lebanon and Jordan, for example, more than three-in-four people support the U.S. military interventions – they both share borders with Syria¹⁹. Palestinians and Turks are also, on balance, supportive. Also 84% of Israelis support the strikes against ISIS (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2015).

Obama’s strategic campaign has garnered, so far, an extensive amount of supporters around the world. When he took office, it was presumably impossible to foresee the imminent threat of a terrorist group with such muscular infrastructural and radiational power as the Islamic State. Yet, the President did succeed in convincing Americans and a major part of the globe that a robust action was needed – even in spite of the disastrous misadventures of the eight years spent in Iraq.

¹⁹ See Appendix 2.

The considerations on the Bush and Obama foreign policy are essential to understand how these administrations have dealt and are still dealing, in the case of Obama, with conflicts in the Middle East region. The Islamic State Iraq is just the most recent and, apparently, most dangerous threat in this sequence of terrorist organizations and militias threatening world peace and order. Before providing an in-depth explanation of the rise of the Islamic State and its origins, it is convenient to present an overview of the U.S. intervention in Iraq and how it galvanized sectarian feelings among a population already deeply stratified by a long-lasting military dictatorship. It should be remembered, from this point onward, that the American intervention, in this essay, is considered as a cataclysmic event in Iraqi and Syrian societies. As it is going to be explained, the U.S. arrival in the region distorted centennial power relations, causing irreparable distortions.

Chapter 3 Safeguarding the American way of live: the U.S. intervention in Iraq and the imposition of democracy

3.1 The case of Iraq and the outcomes of the American intervention: the collapse of the Ba'athist central authority

The American invasion in Iraq, initiated in the Bush administration, has continuously echoed in the entire world during the years that the U.S. troops stood in the region. America's 2003 intervention has been characterized as an unprecedented move in history annals due to the great amount of bellicose apparatus applied; the lack of proof as to the existence of the alleged nuclear, biological and chemical weapons; and the unilateralism of the assault. According to Ali Allawi (2007), the suspicious evidences of imminent threats in the region, which were corroborated by the U.S. government to justify the war, were not able to sustain the "legal status" of the conflict for much longer. In fact, as soon as the truth about the non-existence of the WDM came out, the *casus belli*²⁰ rhetoric was swiftly forgotten by the international community, which became an active demander for far-convincing justifications and, later, for the immediate end of the war.

The relationship among the common rationales used to give grounds for the Iraq war – Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program; the possibility of a terrorist organization laying its hands on these warlike artifacts; and the hope that liberal democracy brings to an the conflicts in the Middle East – remains difficult to untangle. There is a clear reason for this: the policymakers responsible for U.S. intervention did not entirely agree upon the war's aims (PIDLUZNI, 2012, p. 53). Such inaccuracy about the reasons for the intervention was so expressive that even Richard Haas, head of the policy-planning personnel at the State Department at that

²⁰ *Casus belli* is a Latin expression that addresses to an act or event that provokes or is used to justify war. According to Corlenius van Bynkershoek (2007), a nation's *casus belli* refers to direct threats posed against it.

time, affirmed that he would go to his grave without knowing why the U.S went to war in Iraq (YETIV, 2008).

The invasion of Iraq officially began in March 19, 2003, by U.S. troops conducted by the Third Infantry Division and with the strong support of the British government. The 09/11 attacks to U.S. homeland completely changed American position towards the Iraqi regime. In comparison with the situation in the Kuwait war, U.S. intentions under Bush's government were far better established than the contradictory policies of George H. W Bush. In February 1991, the year that the Kuwait war ended, Bush father addressed in a speech that the Iraqi military and civilians should rise and overthrow the dictator by themselves. He, nevertheless, called a unilateral ceasefire right after the Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait. This agreement permitted the unhindered retreat of the Republican Guard Forces back to Iraq without further surveillance from the U.S-Allies side (ALLAWI, 2007)

That arguable position towards Iraq would not be reinforced during George W. Bush administration. In a speech given during the United Nations General Assembly, in 2002, Bush stressed his newly formulated foreign policy agenda:

The history, the logic and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger. Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding or will it be irrelevant? The United States helped found the United Nations. We want the United Nations to be effective and respectful and successful (...) the people of Iraq deserve it. The security of all nations requires it. Free societies do not intimidate through cruelty and conquest. And open societies do not threaten the world with mass murder (BUSH, 2002).

On April 9 2003, when the American military troops and their allies arrived in Baghdad, they witnessed a deeply shattered society led by a minority group. The post-9/11 *jihadi*²¹ culture that would later bedevil Iraq and its milieu was just beginning to take root. In 2003, Iraqi institutions were near death and the Ba'athist ideology was beyond repair (Y.ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015).

By the time the Americans put their boots on Iraqi ground, there has been a massive involvement of exile Iraqis willing to assist both the planning and execution of the invasion (ALLAWI, 2007). They were, overall, dissidents of the regime or part of ethnic and religious groups that have been segregated throughout the entire Ba'athist dictatorship. Most of them had their first contact with U.S. troops in the 1990s, during the Gulf War. Back then, there was great bitterness, chiefly in the Shi'a community, with regard to what they identified as indifference, if not complicity, of the U.S. in allowing the Ba'ath regime the wherewithal to pulverize the uprising of 1991. Many Islamists would come to suspect about U.S. intentions to isolate the regime. It was

²¹ It is a Western term that refers to fighters driven by adherence to extremist Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, the word from which it is derived – jihad – simply means “exertion, struggle”.

unclear for them what were Americans' real intentions in the region²².

In 2003, with the efficacious help of the *pesh merga* (Kurdish Security Forces), the U.S Special Forces had a pivotal tactic advantage over Saddam Hussein's soldiers and the "Arab Allies" mustered by the dictator to overpower the American assault. In addition to the Kurds, there has also been the participation of the Iraqi National Accord and the Iraqi National Congress – both anti-Saddam political parties composed by people who defected from the former dictator's regime. Besides, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its Iran-officered military wing, the Badr Brigade (part of the Shia-based Islamic party in Iran) have also sided with the Americans in order to oust the last Sunni leader of the Iraqi Ba'ath party (COCKBURN, 2015)

Iraqi inhabitants did not meet the American invasion with a cheerful behavior, like the one expected of those who wait for a liberating army to break their fetters. The disintegration of Saddam's long-lasting regime left a power vacuum, especially in the South of the country and in the poor Shia suburbs of Baghdad (ALLAWI, 2007). This situation nurtured the perfect conditions for the rise of Islamist forces²³ and allies, who laid claim to the loyalty of the population and filled in the gap of the state. Ali Allawi (2007) says that similar structures of power have been developed in most of the cities of south Iraq, although they remained undetected by the officials deployed by the U.S. and Coalition. Accordingly, it is not difficult to predict that those shadow-acting governments and the administrative structures placed by the Coalition have engaged into clashes as soon as the Islamist presence became visibly perceptive to the interveners.

The commanders responding to the Coalition, which were chiefly suggested or handpicked by the British Intelligence or the American CIA, had little or none social ties, sensitiveness, or knowledge about the locals. So, the administrations that were placed after the invasion had little capacity for coordinating the provinces of the south and, consequently, rapidly fell apart, giving place to the emergency of Islamists and their local allies. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz argues that the failure to establish control, mainly in the larger cities covered by the Coalition, was due to the scarce number of troops deployed. A larger contingent of soldiers would have given the Coalition the capacity to, at least, dissuade the Islamist wave out of some cities (KELLER, 2003).

There have been different patterns of emergence regarding the rise of Shi'a local governments in the South. In Nasiriya, the city was under the control of tribesmen²⁴ with the support of the Da'awa Party the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Nasiri (REID, 2005). In fact, a plethora of different tribesmen and Islamists seized control of cities such as Badra, Amara, Basra, and Sadr. This uneasy admixture of a formal

²² Allawi (2007) argues that the frequent phrase mentioned by the dissidents was: *Al-Amrikan mu jiddiyyin* (The Americans are not serious [about overthrowing Saddam]). It took nearly a decade before the Islamist parties recognized that the U.S. was serious about ending the Ba'athist regime.

²³ The Islamist forces mentioned above were part of the Shi'a branch of Islam.

²⁴ See Appendix 1 for more information about the Iraqi tribes.

occupation authority and the rise of local power groups with effusively different agendas marked the emergence of provincial politics in the newly enfranchised Shi'a south.

In other parts of the country, the pattern described above was not the one to be followed. In the Sunni Arab regions of Iraq, there has been an increase of the antipathy against the invasion. Most individuals were fearful of losing their prestigious positions in the government due to the disempowerment mission brought by the Americans. According to Allawi (2007), this has marked the materialization of a disparate type of consciousness, resistant to the occupation. Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurdistan did not pose any serious threats as to make the Coalition want to displace the governing structures of the Kurdish territory. Instead, the only major problem regarding the Kurds was their attempt to extend their territorial scope into cities like Mosul, Kirkuk and the Nineveh province.

Amid this uneasy mixture of different agendas and objectives among the several ethnic and religious groups, the central government in Baghdad collapsed in April 9, 2003. This has led to the beginning of widespread looting and destruction of properties in the whole country.

This scenario was just the beginning of the tragedy that was yet to come. Allawi says that "the mostly Shi'a population of the South had stubbornly refused to make the connection between the overthrow of a hated regime and the invasion and occupation of the country" (ALLAWI, 2007, p. 95). The Sunni Arab groups, on the other hand, were resentful and sullen, willing to wait for the right time to deliver an opportune response for their dislodgement and disenfranchisement. The Kurds were eager to make the fullest out of the invasion, changing their borders and putting themselves as the Coalition's indispensable ally towards winning the war.

The United States, although the only apparent responsible for setting this disorder down, had no plans whatsoever to the post-war governance period in Iraq. The Iraqi exile groups did not have a consensus on how to proceed after the overthrowing of the dictatorship. Most of them were rather interested on how they would assume the power, instead of thinking on the task of running a country on a daily basis. The details on the transfer of control from a dictatorial and centralized Ba'athist Iraq to a legitimate and democratic structure of governing were left uniquely to the USA. The Americans, nevertheless, have failed in addressing to this necessity. This has come with a price, as we shall see below.

3.2 The attempt to reconstruct a devastated country

The future of the post-war Iraq was only debated in the occasion of a series of hearings held by the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate, in February 23, 2003. Marc Grossman, Under Secretary of State, and Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense, were among the artificers of the three-stage plan to transfer the authority of the country back to Iraqi people. The plan involved the following steps: (i) an immediate post-war military administration with the aim to stabilize the country; (ii) a steady transfer of power to an Iraqi transitional authority; and (iii) the development of a constitution, whose dictates would be the basis of the new government. These three stages were assigned to the newly created Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA). The office was created following Bush's decision to give Pentagon control over the post-war planning in Iraq (RUBIN, 2004).

With regard to the Interim Iraqi Authority (IIA), the State Department organized the Conference of Naisiriya to proceed as fast as tactically possible with the stabilization of Iraq. The Conference adopted a list of points stating the need of democracy, a federal system, and a government whose actions would have to be abided by the rule of law (BAGILLI, 2003). The immediate and complete dissolution of the Ba'athist Party was also among the issues discussed at the conference. Although the agenda for the "new Iraq" seemed to be a groundbreaking and advanced one, with statements on pluralism, market economy, and constitutionalism, it had little practical effect. This perfect portrait of what the future of Iraq would look like has quickly crumbled down with the atrocities of brutal actual life. In fact, while the meeting was being held, about ten people were killed and several were injured in the city of Mosul (WATSON; PERRY, 2003).

The ORHA ended up being interpreted as an ambiguous and inefficient instrument. In a late memo to Tony Blair's advisers, John Sawyer, Blair's special envoy to Iraq, indicated ORHA as having neither leadership nor strategy towards the improvement of the situation in Iraq.

In fact, Jay Garner, head of ORHA, and the organization itself were criticized for not curtailing the wild looting in the country; for their inability to provide adequate public services; for not establishing a cutoff to lawlessness acts; and for allowing senior representatives of the Ba'athist Party in high-level positions. His administration's statistics hang quite hollow whether compared to the physical hardship that the Iraqis had to face even after the invasion (RUBIN, 2004)

After such critiques, news began to flow from Washington's high-level personnel stating that a diplomat would be the next to be appointed to manage the nation-building process in Iraq. On May 6, George W. Bush announced that Paul Bremer would substitute for Jay Garner as the new U.S. Administrator in Iraq (SCHWEID, 2003). Subsequently, on May 8 2003, Collin Powell stated that both the U.S. and the United Kingdom were on the verge of getting a UN resolution that would, effectively, give them the status of occupying powers in Iraq. It did not take too long until the

United Nations' approval of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), authorized by the UN Resolution 1483, on May 22, 2003. There was no formal announcement as to whether the ORHA's attributions were replaced or seized by the CPA. It is rather implied that ORHA's reconstruction process mandate and its duty to build new institutions and governing structures would now be part encompassed by the Coalition. Garner, by his turn, would fall under Paul Bremer's authority, since he was nominated the CPA administrator.

The UN Resolution aforementioned (1483) represented the resumption of a multilateral approach to the situation in the post-war Iraq. Sergio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, was nominated the first UN Special Representative of the Secretary General in order to assist the formation of an interim Iraqi authority. The formation of the Iraqi Governing Council, its final hybrid form, is due to Mello's participation in the debate. He made sure to push the negotiations away from the normative position of the advisory body, commanded by Bremer.

On July 23, 2003, the assembling of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was complete. The group, instead of the Coalition itself, announced its own formation with the aim to foster that it was an Iraqi affair (BREMER, 2006). The aim of the Council was to assist the CPA on the Iraqi transitional government (KATZMAN, 2006). The IGC, nonetheless, was seen by most of the Arab public opinion as another instrument for foreign control. It had fought for its own legitimacy until the day of the first elections in Iraq, in January 2005.

3.3 The silent transformations in a brittle society: the deepening of rifts in Iraq

An unprecedented scenario took over Iraq's political, social and cultural affairs by the time the Ba'athist regime fell down. Never in modern history Iraqi inhabitants have been able to face the question as to where their true loyalty and identity belonged. Such behavior was effusively censured by the state, whose chief aim was to make outsiders believe, as well as its own population, that grievances and disparities among groups did not exist.

The airing of such community differences was taboo and could lead to unthinkable sorts of condemnations. Any mention that the state was "institutionally biased against certain communities" (ALLAWI, 2007, p. 132), for example, was treated as high treason – a threat to the national unity to whom someone owes allegiance. The discourse on avoiding the acknowledgement of differences and sectarianism among groups has been used as the state's ultimate weapon to avoid sedition (*fitna*, in Arab). Therefore, the political agenda in Iraq, principally during Saddam Hussein's regime, was channeled in as many directions as to bolster other pro-government policy issues, such as Arab nationalism and socialism, but never focused on the sectarian basis of power (AL-'ALAWI, 1989).

Iraq was a house of cards waiting to be blown away by the slightest sign of

disagreements or even by the smallest core of insurgency. The rhetoric on sectarianism was so deep-rooted and historically enforced by the regime that the dialogue among the parts would not be enough to make up for the years of denial and segregation of the minority groups. The repression and marginalization of those individuals had crafted the reality that was just about to come along with the American invasion.

There are three main groups in Iraq at the center of this storm. The Kurds had managed to slip out of this situation because of their unique status. The years of their semi-independence have guaranteed to the group special treatment within the Iraqi government. The Shi'a branch was a different, yet complicated, matter. Their set of beliefs, own conception of a nation-state, and loyalty to certain Islamist specificities were going to be critical in determining the course of the country's political future in the occasion of a regime change. The Sunnis, who had composed Iraq's army and was the administration backbone since Faisal I (1921-1933)²⁵ and whose domination extended to every border of Iraq, had begun to see their long-lasting predominance crashing down. The sort of state that would replace the previous one was dependent on how these disparate communities had been treated throughout the years.

With regard to the American occupation, it has **“overturned a laboriously constructed system of rule and authority that had become grotesquely distorted during the last decade of the Ba’ath”** (ALLAWI, 2007, p. 133). This assertion highlights that the main issue in question had not so much to do with the invasion itself, but with the societal superstructure²⁶ in which the Americans intended to lay a democratic regime upon. The management of the Ba’athist regime seemed to be sustained by a monolithic basis, apparently unaffected by any sorts of shocks – external²⁷ or domestic. Nevertheless, in a final analysis, the system was held together by the threat and use of extreme force and brutality.

Saddam's dictatorship had succeeded in spreading fear and apprehension as the main governing instrument for setting order both in the social and political spheres of Iraq. The massive fissures inside Iraqi society have widened throughout the years in which the Ba’athist Party ruled the country. It was only with the fall of the heavy dictatorial methods of governing that those societal disruptions rose into the light of day.

At first, the signals of the overthrown of Hussein's dictatorship were confuse and difficult to be comprehended. The scattered crowds of onlookers that praised the Coalition's military success seemed perplexed and unable to hide their anxiety and unsureness of how the overthrow of the government would affect them. Despite that,

²⁵ Faisal I (1885–1933) was king of the Arab Kingdom of Syria in 1920 and reigned as the king of Iraq between 1921–33. He was supported by the British and by fervent Arab nationalists. Under his rule, Iraq achieved full independence in 1932. Faisal II (1935–58), grandson of Faisal I, reigned from 1939 to 1958. He was the last king of Iraq, being assassinated in a military coup, after which a republic was established.

²⁶ Rigby (1998), citing Karl Marx, affirms that the superstructure of a society encompasses its ideology, culture, identity, social institutions, political structures, and the state itself (the political apparatus responsible for governing a society).

²⁷ The Ba’athist regime resisted to one of the uprisings most likely to overthrow it, in 1991, even with the presence of U.S. troops in the region.

the Shi'ite displays of joy were undeniably genuine. The news of the fall of the regime unleashed a spontaneous public outburst of rejoicing in the Shi'a population located in the slums nearby Baghdad and in the southern towns. They would, later, begin to penetrate the main towns and cities previously controlled by the Ba'athist regime, causing the Sunnis to fear for their own position in society.

3.4 The relation of Iraqi sectarian groups to the American invasion

The Kurds were undoubtedly the most enthusiastic about the American-Coalition invasion of Iraq. As it was already mentioned, the *pesh merga* actively participated and assisted the U.S. Special Forces in the country. The Kurdish army did so by securing the American installations in the northern cities, which are part of the autonomous territory of Kurdistan.

Despite their welcome to the foreign interveners, there were some sectors of the Kurdish population linked to extreme Islamists. Those are known as *Ansar al-Islam* (Supporters of Islam) and are believed to be a mixture of shadowy *jihadi* militia groups, which tracked down their origins back to the American war in Afghanistan, and Saudi-sponsored organizations (RUBIN, 2001). It is said that the *jihadis* were drawn to Kurdistan for several criteria. The most accepted is that the terrain of the borderlands with Iran and Turkey is mountainous and, consequently, of difficult access to any unwanted foreign forces.

The Sunni Arab community of Iraq had vigorously avoided using a sectarian label to refer to the situation in the country. The bloodshed that accompanied the uprising in 1991, for example, was never recognized by the Sunni Arab oppositionists for what it really was: an indiscriminate terror campaign against the Shi'a community.

Sunni exiles refrained from direct confront with the oppositionist's formal structures. But as the United States became increasingly committed to implementing a regime change, some key Sunni groups commenced to engage in the process. They refused, however, to erect a "Sunni bloc" to stand up against the Shi'a and Kurdish ones. This reluctance in assuming the existence of a sectarian disruption in Iraq continued even in the post-war era.

According to Allawi (2007), there are three different trends regarding the Sunni Arabs' opinion on the occupation of Iraq:

- (i) The first current of opinion was rather inclined to defect the Sunni movement in order to side, belatedly, with the opposition and accept the concept of regime change at the hands of a foreign democratic power. This group had as one of its main objectives the shift in the basis of Iraqi social and political matters from ethnicity and sectarianism to a polity able to cope with both

gender and human rights agenda, a democratic process of nation-building, the perpetuation of Iraq linkage with the Arab tradition, and an increasingly pro-Western orientation. By analyzing the fulcrum of their demands, it becomes clear that the individuals of this group represented a weak minority among the Sunni post-war thinking, as they clung to a more liberal and democratic political position.

- (ii) The second group was formed by individuals who had stayed in Iraq and had stood against the perpetuation of the Ba'athist regime. Liberal lawyers and professionals, academics, and also significant political parties such as the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) composed this group. These individuals were only tolerated by Saddam Hussein's regime because of their mild criticism to the government and to demonstrate that the regime had some "tolerance" and willingness to dialogue with estimable dissidents.
- (iii) The third one was the largest current of opinion among the Sunnis. They rejected the invasion and despised the democratic and liberal premises upon which a new government was going to be built. This group was formed by the leadership squad of the old Ba'athist order: bureaucrats and diplomats, businessmen, academics and tribal chiefs. Those individuals were the roots of what was going to become the resistance to the occupation. (ALLAWI, 2007).

The rejection of the new imposed policy and the fear of a conscious ascendancy among the Shi'a community were common denominators in the thinking of all Sunni Arabs, regardless of their opinion towards the war and occupation per se.

Despite their leading position during the decades in which the Ba'athist Party ruled, all of Sunni Arab communities were eagerly refusal to accept that the ground rules in which the Iraqi government had been based for decades were about to be redefined under the scope of a sectarian identity. The Sunnis started to fear the rise of the Shi'a community and the Coalition occupying forces. This situation left Sunni Arabs in an unstable state of being active or passive towards the new order that was being imposed. It was already common sense to the population that a foreign, "unnatural", force had completely removed the Ba'athist system of power and authority.

With regard to the Shi'a Arab community, the scenario of the post-war era revealed the prospects for changing their long social and political marginalization and disenfranchisement under the Iraqi Ba'athist regime. Following the downfall of Baghdad, they had become aware that there were no more chains inhibiting their actions.

The years in which the Ba'athist regime dominated Iraq could be summed up in the declaration of war against the majority of its citizens. This behavior has led to the almost complete destruction of oppositionist institutions and religious leadership. This time, however, the Shi'a population would not bend to the Sunni opposition; instead they would prevent this from happening again. The Shi'a Arabs would now strive to mold the new Iraq state to attend their own requirements and demands (MCASKILL, 2003).

Thereby, it is noteworthy that the majority of the Shi'a Arabs were satisfied with the foreign occupation because it allowed them to finally ascend to power. Nevertheless, the group did not approve the remaining position of the United States in the Coalition Provisional Authority. This opinion was based on the fear of retrograding to the Ba'athist history of dominance. But, this time, it would be the Americans to assume the position of the tyrannies (KATZ, 2012).

Chapter 4 Anatomy of the Iraqi Insurgency and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (I.S./ISIL/ISIS)

4.1 The first rumblings of the insurgency

With the capture and death of Saddam Hussein, on December 13, 2003, the Coalition started the institutionalization of the new Iraqi state. What they failed to recognize, however, was that the capture of the dictator represented the closure of only one of the several channels of the conflict: the war to depose Saddam Hussein. In other words, Saddam's falling was only a blip of what was about to come. Saddam Hussein's capture gave new momentum to the rebels' cause by "shoring up their religious/jihadist credentials" (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, 2006, p. 9). In spite of the "Mission Accomplished" speech of May 1, 2003, delivered by U.S. President George W. Bush, and the retreat of the U.S. administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, along with the fragmentation of the CPA, in June 28, 2004, the conflict in Iraq had not reached its end.

The de-Ba'athification of the government was seen as a pivotal step towards the rise of the new Iraqi state. This politicized process was perceived as a heavy burden to the Sunni population – chiefly to the individuals that composed the former state apparatus – as they have foreseen some sort of "revenge" coming their way. The members of other Iraqi communities, the Shi'as and Kurds, for example, did not anticipate any imminent threat coming from the transformational prowess of the Anglo-American coalition (BARRET, 2014)

The CPA maneuver was a profound and indiscriminate attempt to re-territorialize Iraqi political boundaries. It divided even more communities by spreading violence and reorganizing their economic and social ties (Y.ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015). These processes brought by the invasion and the later institutionalization in the post-2003 denied Iraq's diverse population a chance to build up a shared history for the first time. In addition, the neglect of indigenous political expression and leadership, as well as the orientation that the new Iraqi political leaders were paving the way towards Iran (dominated by a Shi'a majority) and the U.S. patronage completely

seized any possibility of a procedural democratic government to rise.

The elections of 2005, 2010 and 2014 have all demonstrated a predominant national will for democratic practices and the institutionalization of representative democracy. Nevertheless, the institutions supposed to foment free expression and inclusiveness have never come to materialize. The governments of the post-Saddam era have continuously denied voice to civil society and alternative political actors. The changes imposed to Iraq have erased any sense of “self” from the population and precluded its inhabitants from sharing common places in a new political environment (Y.ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015).

The Kurds, with their autonomous territory in the north of the country, and the Shi’a community in the south – which has gathered power from the transnational opposition to the Ba’athist regime – have successfully entrenched themselves into the new polity. On the other hand, the Sunnis of the west and central part of Iraq, as well as indigenous local authorities, were prevented from enjoying such opportunities and were targeted by the new security system erected by the interveners. Summing up, legitimate actors, such as the local authorities, were denied participation in the new government for alleged alliances with the previous Ba’athist regime or supposed linkages with international terrorist groups, like al-Qaeda (ALLAWI, 2007).

The effects of the counterinsurgency operations conducted by the Coalition have come along with the denial of responses to local demands as well as military assaults conducted by the former Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014), to control the resentful population. This attitude alienated the groups in the regions affected by those policies of marginalization and segregation. These regions, composed of a majority of Sunni Arab individuals as well as an enormous range of religious and ethnic minorities, would bear the brunt of fighting the occupation and its attempt to implant a new political order (ALLAWI, 2007)

The insurgent groups were predominantly formed by Sunni Arab individuals. They had numerous reasons for joining the insurgency, such as fighting against their marginalization – in the occasion of the ascension of Shi’a Arab groups –, and the desire to remove the foreign forces from Iraq. Jonathan William Pidluzny (2012) adds that, although the de-Ba’athification of Iraq did not exactly mean the de-Sunnification, it was just how the Sunni Arabs thought of it (PIDLUZNY, 2012).

The Human Rights Watch (2005) stresses that there were broadly three general categories regarding the insurgent groups in Iraq:

- (i) The first was composed by groups that sympathized with the extreme Islamist branch. They rejected the invasion and despised the democratic and liberal premises upon which a new government was going to be built. Those individuals were the roots of what was going to become the resistance to the occupation. They seek to solidify an Islamic State with institutional and governing structures based on a strict interpretation of the Qur’an. Some

examples of militia that belong to this extreme Sunni-Islamist category are the *Ansar al-Sunna* (Supporters of the Sunni) and al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia²⁸, run by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who is believed to be the creator of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). For these groups, the Iraq war would be a *jihad* against the imperialism of the United States and the so-called polytheist and traitors of the Islam.

- (ii) The second group was formed by the leadership squad of the old Ba'athist order. Some individuals that compose this current of opinion looked after the return of their old leader, whereas others have no such connection with the ousted dictator.
- (iii) The third, also known as the Sunni nationalist, was comprised by Sunni Arabs individuals who wish to expel foreign forces from Iraq. However, they did not wish to do so by claiming any links to the Ba'athist party or any religion aspects. They tended to be guided by Islamic principles, and wanted them to thrive in the new Iraq, although did not share the same aspirations of the extreme Islamist groups (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2005).

It was in August 2003 that the dimensions of the insurgency grew exponentially. There was a powerful car bomb attack to the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, the U.N Headquarters²⁹, and the Imam Ali Holy Shrine (FILKINS; WORTH, 2003). The motives for the bombings were not clear at first. Several theories were put forward, including the possibility of being an attack from Al-Qaeda. In fact, according to analyses concluded years later, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi orchestrated the attack. He is believed to have created the Al-Qaeda affiliated organization *Tawhid wal Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), in Iraq, in 2002. That would become the Islamic State of Iraq years later (BLANCHARD; HUMUD; KATZMAN; WEED, 2015).

4.2 The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – first considerations

ISIL's emergence can be explained as the cataclysm coincident with the obliteration of state authority in some regions of Iraq and Syria (ALPHER, 2014). ISIL is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent militia that has spread its dominance over northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria beginning in 2013 – threatening the security of both countries and drawing increased attention from the international community (BLANCHARD HUMUD; KATZMAN; WEED, 2015). In a large measure, the retreat of state authority in both countries can be attributed to U.S. policy in the region.

Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the mastermind behind ISIL's roots, was convinced that an

²⁸ Also known as Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers or Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

²⁹ This bombing ended up killing Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello – former U.N High Commissioner for Refugees.

alliance with Al-Qaeda would entice new soldiers as well as funds, while Bin Laden needed a more assertive presence in Iraq, the state with the most active front for *jihād* at that time (BARRET, 2014).

In a letter sent to Osama Bin Laden, in the fall/winter of 2003/2004, al-Zarqawi externalizes his hatred towards the Shi'a Arab community:

[The Shi'a are] the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom (...) These [have been] a sect of treachery and betrayal throughout history and throughout the ages (...) I come back and again say that the only solution is for us to strike the religious, military, and other cadres among the Shi'a with blow after blow until they bend to the Sunnis (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2004).

Al-Zarqawi arrived to the Iraqi regime-change scene proclaiming to be a master in frightful murders and indiscriminate attacks to civilians. The Jordanian-born terrorist was eager to deepen even more the lines dividing the Iraqi society, chiefly those lying in between the Shi'a and Sunni communities. His aim was to erect a massive civil war, in which the Sunnis would eventually rise as the winners. In a letter released by the CPA, in February 2004, Zarqawi communicated to Osama bin Laden that “whether they succeed in dragging the Shi'a into the sectarian war, it would be possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they would feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of the Shi'a (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2004). This letter was, in other words, a call to attack the Shi'a Arab population and, as they would fight back the Sunni groups. The latter would end up joining the insurgent forces and showing support against the Shi'a. With the backup of the Islamic world's Sunni majority, the Shi'a would be ousted from their newly obtained positions in power. The Sunnis would, then, retrieve their rightful places in the Iraq front.

Despite the direct confrontations highlighted in Zarqawi letter, the CPA and Iraqi political class underestimated his abilities to galvanize an insurgency or signs of a civil war. CPA's spokesman, Dan Senor, linked the letter to the insurgent's incapacity to frustrate the development of Iraqi new institutional and legal structures. Contrary to the U.S. and coalition expectations, Zarqawi's organization would thrive along time, eventually surpassing the group which it pledged allegiance and served as a branch in Iraq: Al-Qaeda. The Coalition had never predicted the rise of Zarqawi as an insurgent. He had been visualized as a mere secondary figure before the Iraq war. Collin Powell, in a speech to the UN's Security Council in early February 2003, connected Zarqawi with the former Ba'athist authorities in order to solidify his justifications that Saddam Hussein's regime was directly connected to Al-Qaeda and the international terrorism web (ALLAWI, 2007).

Zarqawi's real name was Ahmad Fadheel Nazal al-Khalayla. Born in Zarqa, a town located in northeast Jordan, he added a suffix to the city's name and became “Zarqawi”, the name by which he was going to be known later on (ROSEN, 2006). In

1989, he left Jordan and headed to Afghanistan in the moment that the war against the USSR was about to end. It was in that country that Zarqawi first met Osama Bin Laden and the mentor of the ideologies that he would come to adopt: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi³⁰ (ALLAWI, 2007).

In Iraq, Zarqawi made use of what he had learned with Maqdisi. He brought the *takfiri*³¹ ideology and tried to use it against the Shi'a community – even against the will of his own mentor, who was fearful of the outcomes of his own teachings. As the commander of the *jihadi* Salafist³² movement, Zarqawi would gather plenty of support in his vicious and dreadful ways of operating in Iraq – chiefly after abandoning Maqdisi in order to be Al-Qaeda's eyes in Iraq.

The amount of Sunni individuals who shared a common belief with the Salafi Islam began to increase at the end 2003 and beginning of 2004. Ideas like the Arab nationalism, liberalism and even the evocation of Ba'athist regime were useless to bring balance and order to this sector of Iraqi society.

From 2006 to the mid-2007, Iraq's situation was critical. The death of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, in 2006, by the hands of the Coalition had no effect on the number of insurgent attacks. By the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007, the *jihadists* started to drive apart their main supporters so far – former Ba'athists, disenfranchised indigenous, and “patriotic” Sunnis afraid of their future in a Shi'ite dominated Iraq (PIDLUZNY, 2012). It is important to remember that the insurgency's initial cohesion had been a product of their shared short-term aim: to expel U.S. troops and foment sufficient turmoil to prevent a national Shiite ascendancy. After achieving those two final goals, ISIL was no longer dependent upon Sunni and other local groups.

The principles to which the *Jihadists* abided jeopardized economic recovery, as well as the instability inside the new Iraq. The *jihadists* gradually began to lose Sunni support as these individuals became more conscious about their losses whether they stood with the insurgents. As AQI's true intentions commenced to be visible – i.e. the implementation of policies more frightening than those believed to come from a Shi'ite government – it became obvious that AQI was an imminent threat to the society (PIDLUZNY, 2012). One example of such threat came from a citizen, initially sympathetic to the *jihad* principles, but who ultimately exposed his disagreement with the jihadist way:

We have nothing against *mujahidin*³³ fighting in the name of God.
But these people tarnished the notion of jihad. They targeted

³⁰ Maqdisi is a Palestinian-born preacher who is seen as a spiritual mentor to al-Qaida. He was arrested in 2014 and denounced ISIL/ISIS publicly for creating its so-called caliphate (BROOKE, 2006).

³¹ It is a derogatory term applied by the Shi'a to all extremist Sunni who justify the anathema or killing of the Shi'a (ALLAWI, 2007).

³² The Salafi movement, also referred to as Wahhabis, represents a diverse community, including Osama Bin Laden, and reflects a broad array of positions regarding issues related to politics and violence (WIKTOROWICZ, 2006).

³³ *Mujahidin*, plural form of the word *mujahid*, is the term used to characterize someone who is engaged in *jihad*. Its meaning is close to “combatant” or holy warrior”.

educated people and tribal leaders, they blurred lines and interfered in everything. They banned cigarettes and even ruled that tomatoes and cucumbers couldn't be mixed together. They blew up mobile phone relays. Islam never taught us decapitation. Those committing these crimes often were foreign to Fallujah – not necessarily foreigners, but ignorant peasants who killed people as if slaughtering mere animals (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, 2008, pp. 13-14).

The Sunni wing of the insurgency became aware that the *jihadists* were, actually, a greater threat to the interests that had made them join the insurgency. Neither the American military contingency nor the Shi'ite politicians were believed to be as dreadful as what the *jihadist* had in mind for Iraq. Besides, while the Sunnis and other local groups were fighting a battle of resistance that had, *prima facie*, an end date and a specific aim – the withdrawal of the U.S. military contingent – the *jihadists'* goal went beyond that – the true battle, the one that would lead to a Caliphate, was only beginning (PIDLUZNY, 2012).

With the withdrawal of U.S. military in 2011, America was no longer a target of the insurgent groups in Iraq – at least not directly. The American exit also represented the cessation of the flows of cash and the provision of weapons and training to the central government. In the twenty-four months following the withdrawal, the discontent of the communities, which was triggered by Prime Minister al-Maliki's regime policies, has only grown. In addition to this, Tareq Ismael and Jacqueline Ismael (2015) affirm that “while global attention focused on the ‘Arab Spring’ and the descent of Syria into a charnel house of cruel bloodletting, these regions of Iraq were also ignored in global media coverage and policy circles” (Y. ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015, p. 220).

Unwilling to rectify and legitimize Sunni grievances, al-Maliki launched a vicious attack on April 23, 2013, by using Iraq's state security forces against Sunni rebels. Such demonstration of violence was used by the regime to set up a connection between the Sunnis and the threat of “terrorism” in the region and to camouflage the failed attempt to put forward a nation-building process by the Coalition and al-Maliki's regime.

The institutional arrangements briskly erected by the Anglo-American coalition to form the new Iraqi state have proved fragile. The prospects for the new state have been built upon assumptions disconnected to Iraqi historical experience and uncompromised with Iraqi self-determination.

The upsurges witnessed in 2014 – which challenged both public order and the prospects for Iraq's future – were not a result of ISIL's rise alone, nor an outcome derived from the transnational actors that followed the Coalition's new polity to Iraq. The success of the ethno-sectarian policy defended by the radicals is a direct response to the occupation of Iraq by the Americans and the state bequeathed to its population (Y. ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015). The massive wave of violence that ISIL caused in the summer of 2014 has completely undermined the state shaped by the Shi'a

population, which was brought by the American invasion of 2003 (COCKBURN, 2015). ISIL is the result of the combination of events both inherent to Iraqi [and Syrian] society and external variables imposed to it.

4.3 The Syrian Uprising and its connection to ISIL

At first, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, ISIL's leader since May 2010, perceived the Syrian uprising as a serious distraction from his plans in Iraq. He was reluctant in sending any representatives, as well as fighters, to the rebellion. However, as the uprising spread and became more violent, he allowed some Syrian members of the group, headed by Abu Mohammed al-Golani, to be deployed in the north of the country in 2011.

Al-Golani was assisted by Ayman al-Zawahiri³⁴, who sent Al-Qaeda operatives from Pakistan and elsewhere to join forces in Syria. It did not take too long until they were able to built up a strong fighting force, enticing new soldiers from both inside and outside Syria (BARRET, 2014). The Syrian war went viral, attracting thousands of recruits from around the globe and completely eclipsing the insurgency in Iraq. Despite Abu Bakr's attempt to assure his leadership both in Syria and Iraq, Golani refused to accept that his newly formed group, *Jabhat al Nusra li Ahl al Sham* (the Support Front for the People of the Levant), was a branch of The Islamic State of Iraq. It was left to Zawahiri to decide on the matter, which ended up revealing his connection with Al-Qaeda to the world.

Zawahiri could not reconcile the two groups or bring them to arbitration. He, then, ordered Abu Bakr to concentrate his operations in Iraq while al-Golani would be responsible for the Syrian region. As it was already expected, Abu Bakr did not agree upon the arrangement proposed, which resulted in the split of his militia from Al-Qaeda Central and Jabhat al Nusra. By the time of his decision, Abu Bakr had already changed the name of this group to Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (the Levant) – ISIS. Abu Bakr eventually managed to establish ISIL's control over the Syrian territory with the support groups with access to the country. It did not take too long until the Islamic State became the most powerful militia in Syria. ISIL's power in Syria was gathered with the attraction of members from other militias; besides the Islamic State established clandestine routes in order to obtain donations and control the black market in the region. Today, ISIL is a high-level opponent to the regime of Bashar al Assad.

ISIS was born out of war. Its members seek to reshape the world resorting to acts of

³⁴ Al-Zawahiri was pointed as the current leader of Al-Qaeda Central organization since Bin Laden's death.

violence. The movement's extreme religious beliefs and military skill is the outcome of the war in Iraq since the US invasion of 2003 and the war in Syria since 2011. There is a consensus between Western governments and media that the civil war in Iraq was renewed by the sectarian policies of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. With regard to the Syrian war, it destabilized Iraq when *jihadi* militias like ISIL found a new battlefield where they could fight and flourish.

It was the United States, some European countries, and their regional allies in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates that crafted the conditions for the rise of ISIL. They allowed the Syrian war to reach its zenith, in spite of the fact that it was clear, since 2012, that Assad would not fall (COCKBURN, 2015).

4.4 The current situation

June 29 2014 was the day in which the Islamic State declared the revival of the Caliphate³⁵, entitled "The Islamic State", and established Abu Bakr as the Caliph. The announcement had the purpose of attracting the attention of thousands Muslims, chiefly those who shared the salafist/takfiri views expressed by The Islamic State.

Currently, ISIL controls large parts of the Iraqi and Syrian territory. In the latter, the group found the perfect place to capitalize on the state's volatile situation amid a civil war. The terrorist group employs brutal tactics that include mass killings and abductions of members of religious and ethnic minorities — all of which has sparked widespread outrage and calls for American military intervention.

On September 10, 2014, President Obama announced a comprehensive strategy to "degrade and destroy" ISIS in both Iraq and Syria. The campaign is focused on an expanded air war against the Islamic State in both countries and the provision of arms and training to local allies on the ground — the Iraqi army, the Kurdish *pesh merga*, and "moderate" Syrian rebels.

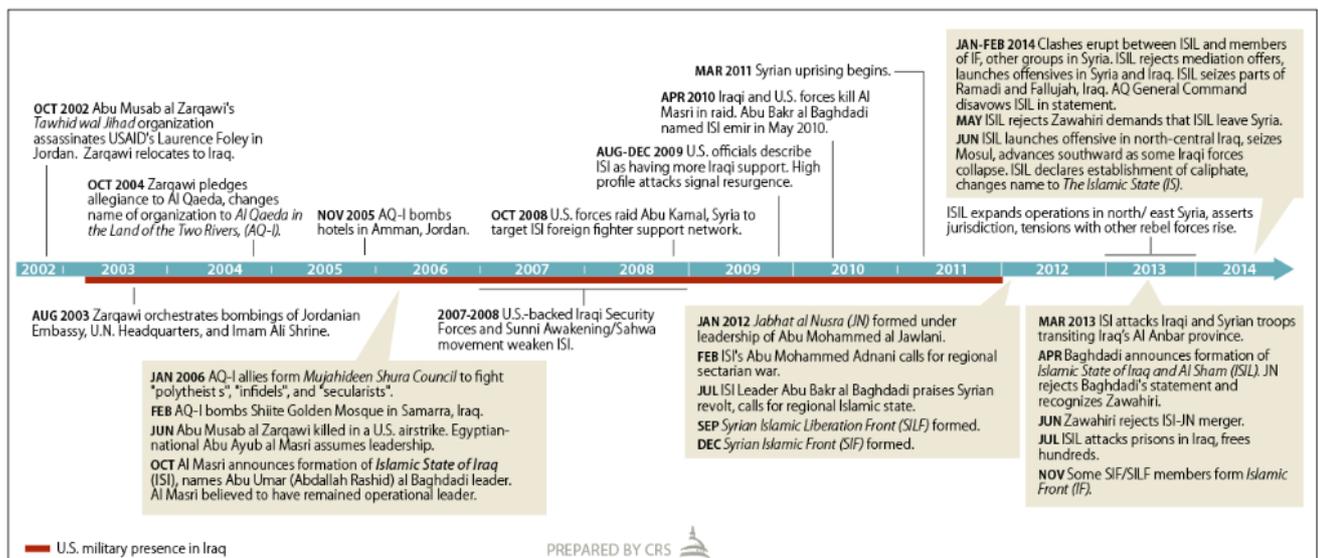
U.S. strategy consists of leading a multilateral coalition aimed at (i) employing direct military action; (ii) providing advice, training, and equipment for partner ground forces in Iraq and Syria; (iii) gathering and sharing intelligence; (iv) and using financial measures against the Islamic State. The objective of these measures is to progressively shrink the geographic and political space, manpower, and financial resources available to the Islamic State organization. U.S. officials refer to their strategy as "**Iraq-first**" and "**ISIL-first**" amid criticism by some in Congress that more attention should be paid to the civil war in Syria and more effort should be made to oust Syrian President Bashar al Asad.

³⁵ The last Caliphate, run by the Ottoman Turks, was dissolved by the Turkish Government in 1924.

The Islamic State has both suffered losses to Kurds and other rebels and made gains against pro-Asad forces in fighting during 2015. President Obama has ruled out deploying ground combat forces to Iraq or Syria, but has not forbidden the provision of aircraft controllers, additional military advisors, new weapons, or other related ground-based military assets (BLANCHARD; HUMUD; NIKITIN, 2015).

ISIL has demonstrated, so far, an incredible resilience despite the constant attacks of the U.S. and Coalition. This capability of reconstruction and reinvention does not date from the last years. In fact, I.S. had to rebuild its military and strategic assets numerous times since al-Zarqawi's *Tawhid wal Jihad* – the very outset of the organization. The figure below shows how ISIL has evolved and solidified its basis throughout the years during which it paved its way until the group's insurgency (BLANCHARD; HUMUD; KATZMAN; WEED, 2015):

Figure 2: Timeline – ISIL's Trajectory



Source: Prepared by CRS using U.S. Government Open Source Center reporting and other open sources, 2015.

5.1 Interpreting the rise of I.S.

Figuring as the most imminent threat on the Middle East scene, the Islamic State gathered the attention of the international community due to its unique *modus operandi*. This involves, particularly, (i) the beheading of Western individuals – mostly tourists and reporters; (ii) the employment of extreme brutal violence – which sometimes resembles the concept of absolute war³⁶ (FERRIS; HANDEL, 1995); (iii) the challenging of Iraqi and Syrian territory partitions, established by the Cambon-Grey agreement³⁷ in 1916; (iv) and the direct confrontation with the Western coalition, formed in late 2014 to counter ISIL’s belligerency.

In this study, it is pointed out some guidelines so as to explain ISIL’s political inscription in Iraqi and Syrian territory: the first states that this form of militancy is a direct outcome of the attempt to re-territorialize the Middle Eastern scenario during the American intervention in Iraq (2003). Matthieu Rey (2015) affirms that the U.S. intervention fosters the convergence of contemporary events in the region: the challenging of the nation-state ideal (based on the Westphalian concept); the imposition of social and economic changes through a neoliberal nation-building rhetoric, on the one hand, and foreign domination on the other; and the employment of new methods of coercion to achieve political outcomes.

The second guideline is about the change in the spatiality of power. This has led to the retaliation of peripheral regions against the authoritative-ruling center. The third guideline defends that the numerous sectors of local population have secured new repertoires of action by the time of the insurgency. Accordingly, I.S. should be primarily analyzed in light of these three aspects.

5.2 The Ba’athist heritage

The states currently targeted by the Islamic State, Iraq and Syria, have been historically and politically compared due to their similarities: they bear a quite complex ethno-religious background; a common Ottoman and, later, dictatorial heritage; their partitioning by European central states at the end of World War I; and

³⁶ According to Clausewitz, “absolute war” or “total war” results from the unconstrained use military apparatuses to completely annihilate an enemy. It is, nonetheless, a Platonic ideal to which only “real war” – the one limited to a certain goal, never reaching its absoluteness – approximates.

³⁷ In the aftermath of WWI, the British and French foreign affairs ministers, Paul Cambon and Edward Grey, signed an agreement partitioning the Ottoman territory based on discussions and negotiations between their representatives Mark Sykes and Georges Picot. The League of Nations granted France mandates over Syria and Lebanon and granted the United Kingdom mandates over Mesopotamia (later Iraq) and Palestine (later divided into Palestine and Transjordan).

their concomitant experience of Ba'athist regimes from 1970 onwards³⁸ (REY, 2015). Thus, the aim here is not to engage in a comparative study on both countries. Rather, it is about finding out how a certain type of government – the Ba'athist – triggered a series of economic, social, political and cultural disruptions that permitted the rise of the Islamic State in Middle East.

The Ba'ath Party was firstly erected in Damascus, Syria, in 1947. In its very beginning, it was led by Syrian intellectuals, such as Salahedin al-Bitar and Michel Aflaq. In the 1950s, the party joined forces with another Syrian political group, the Arab Socialist Party, resulting in the adoption of its final name: the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party (ALLAWI, 2007). It was also in the same decade that the party developed its political basis and started spreading branches in other regions – mostly Arab countries. The most notable experience of exporting the Ba'athist political regime was in Iraq (DEVLIN, 1976). There, the Ba'ath Party started as a tiny part of the opposition groups to the Iraqi monarchy. Nonetheless, by the time of the revolution of 1958, the party grew exponentially – particularly as an alternative to the rising of communism thinking.

In 1968, the Ba'ath Party came to power and remained, in Iraq, for thirty-five years until the 2003 invasion led by the Americans. Under the authority of Saddam Hussein, who was sworn into office in 1979, a coercive regime was fostered based on the following aspects: widespread violence and a system of surveillance; and rewards and incentives for supporters of the regime. When the Americans invaded Iraq, they found out government documents stressing the horrifying situation to which Saddam Hussein exposed its population. According to the content disclosed, Iraqi Ba'athist regime was “as authoritarian and brutal as Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, and al-Gaddafi’s Libya” (SASSOON, 2012, p.1).

The roots of the Islamic State in the regime of Saddam Hussein seem to be pretty deep, according to research. Current members of ISIL – political advisers, military commanders and fighters – commenced as loyalists of the Ba'ath Party. These ex-Ba'athists operate ISIL now. Their former experience as followers of Saddam Hussein is evident in the maneuvers they are employing now.

After the 1963 coup that first gave the Ba'athists a share of power in Iraq's government, Saddam became head of the secret Jehaz Al-Khass, or Special Branch, and collected meticulous dossiers on friends and enemies alike. Saddam used these dossiers to carry out a political putsch in the mid-sixties, as well as the bloodless 1968 coup that brought his party to full control of Iraq. From 1968 until 2003, Ba'athists controlled every aspect of Iraqi life and generalized the surveillance techniques that Saddam had used so effectively in his rise to power.

A quick glance at both countries' common Ba'athist experience already highlights the ways in which law-based forms of governing a state were ripped off and replaced by

³⁸ Baath party officers seized power in 1963, temporarily in Iraq and definitely in Syria.

the personalization of relationships that culminated in the leader/dictator's authority. Barbara Geddes (2004) explains that the phenomenon of "regime narrowing" happens by the time of a seizure of power. As the new ruler attempts to establish his position, the new regime tends to follow a more hierarchical and centralized perspective. According to Geddes, "leadership narrows and often becomes more personalized, which limits the points of access for both members of society and activists" (GEDDES, 2004, p. 11). The security forces turn to be the most important mechanism of the newly consolidated regime. Violence begins to be used indiscriminately on activists and supporters, not just enemies.

The Ba'athist system is completely centered in the role of the dictator. He is the one who "arbitrates between enforcement bodies, intelligence services, sections of the army and armed wings of the party, all of which have full control over civilian populations" (REY, 2015, p.2). The citizens are subject to the state surveillance apparatuses – i.e., they must regularly provide information on any issue considered relevant by the central government – and are rewarded for their cooperation. These recompenses can be either symbolic or material benefits depending on how close they are with the state enforcement agent.

The Sunni rule of Iraq before 2003, contrary to the common sense, was not Sunni because the Ba'athist ruling ideology was based on a hatred of the Shi'a population or even a feeling of superiority. Al-Qarawee (2013) affirms that this is an oversimplification that misleads people to think that Iraqi history was always permeated by an intense and permanent sectarian conflict. In fact, the national ideology defended by Saddam Hussein and his predecessors was based on the concept of pan-Arabism. This urge to proclaim a sense of unity in Iraq, paradoxically, legitimated or justified an exclusionary power structure in which people Sunni Arab people were the ones controlling its core.

Accordingly, sectarian exclusion and the predominance of a group over another were pretty coincidental considering that the Iraqi regime was a system built on a network of clientelism³⁹. It aspect is even more perceptible considering that the criteria of loyalty were derived from kinship and tribal-regional links. "As those who belong to Arab Sunni tribal-regional congregations were favorably treated, subsequent regimes were defined as Sunni ones" (Al-Qarawee, 2013, p. 1).

Sunnis are a minority of the population, concentrated in the north and west. Since the end of World War I and the creation of Iraq by the British Empire from the defeated Ottoman Empire, Sunnis have controlled Iraqi political sphere in a brutal way – chiefly with Saddam's iron fist. According to Ala Hamoudi (2014) the maintenance of the Shi'a community far from the basis of power was perceived as a mechanism to preserve the state:

Sunnis have always held power in Iraq in significant quantities.

³⁹ It is a social order that depends upon relations of patronage; in particular, a political approach that emphasizes or exploits such relations.

Over the course of decades, through a series of revolutions, the decision to exclude Shia became much more conscious. They were feared as a group that could somehow sell the country to Iran [a powerful Shi'a beacon]. The exclusion of the Shia was not something that was just a historical accident, but was viewed as something that was important to preserve the state in its current form (ALA HAMOUDI, 2014).

It is noteworthy that Iraq borders Iran, a country dominated by a Shi'a ruled government. For years, Iraq feared a Shi'a takeover, but it was only in 2003, when the Saddamist regime fell, that this nightmare became somewhat a bitter reality to the Sunni community.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, both Iraqi and Syrian regimes fostered domestic and political instabilities with the aim to undermine any potential threats, such as social and political groupings, that could somehow interfere in the government. However, in the period of 1990-2000, the countries began to follow different paths - although not consciously. The situation in Iraq after the war with Iran (1980-1988) left the regime with little financial reserves, which ended up favoring a strong exclusive repression regarding the country's internal contestations. In 1991, following the defeat in the Gulf war, the Iraqi regime "morphed into a distinctive Sunni Power" (REY, 2015, p. 3) in order to contend the insurgence of the Kurds and the Shi'a population in the aftermath of the invasion in Kuwait. This transformation of Iraqi social and political system did not ignite the re-emergence of a public sphere; it rather bolstered the partial institutionalization of the state exclusively in the hands of the dictator. This scenario caused the segregation of certain groups, hence forcing them to adopt a more autonomous position to the extent that some militia groups commenced to enjoy royal prerogatives. Rey states that it was in this "context that the 2003 American invasion intervened, causing the decision center to collapse after just a few weeks of fighting" (REY, 2015, p. 3).

With regard to Syria, the country did not engage in any sort of political major reconfiguration in the 1990s. However, Syrian central power was strongly affected by the demise and fall of Assad's institutional power. The dictator then started to demand the population to obey to his values through tacit consent. Those who followed his command were rewarded with partial autonomy in the regime.

This situation changed by the beginning of the 2000s, when the so-called "eternal president" (*al-ra'is al-khalid*) passed away and, consequently, was succeeded by his younger son, Bashar al-Assad. Since he was sworn into office, al-Assad shaped the balance of power in three ways, which led to the background that caused the 2011 uprising. Firstly, just like the Ba'athist government in Iraq before 2003, the structure of power was left unchallenged - permitting the cultivation of largely personalized relations with certain sector of the society.

Second, in consequence of the decision to uphold a greater personalization of the regime, Assad had to separate himself from the "caciques" of the dictatorship,

dissolving the collegial body that governed Syria along with Hafez al-Assad, his Bashar's father. In other words, Assad had to challenge a long-established polyarchy in order to favor the ascension of men without local roots that could support his maintenance in power as well the centralization of the regime (REY, 2015).

The third aspect is linked to the international perturbations that shook the regime - i.e. the American invasion of Iraq and the withdrawal of the Syrian military from Lebanon, 2005. These events, together, caused the regime to change dramatically its modus operandi. Syria underwent a major geopolitical transformation that gave rise to the formation of informal networks of power. By the time the 2011 insurgency broke out, the Syrian territory was torn apart. The country had a myriad of network groupings organized into some sort of formal and informal activities, whose partial autonomy resulted from the lack of a common space in the public sphere.

5.3 Preliminary Conclusions

Today, the Sunni Arab community in Iraq and Syria are subjected to a strong "Sunnification" dynamic. This sectarian feeling is a result of the deep social and political alienation of the post-Saddam Iraq and after the Syrian civil war. Both Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Massoud Barzani, sought to take advantage of the absence of a united and powerful Sunni leadership in order to promote their political agendas.

The American invasion and the Syrian civil war represented critical moments for Iraq and Syria. Both events revealed what was hiding underneath the basis of both authoritarian regimes: a system that completely eroded any possibility of political and economic developments as result of the reinforcement of autocratic rulers that undermined potentials to foster a real sense of unity in the population.

ISIL's current organization is essentially structured by a Ba'athist amalgam composed by nearly every Sunni tribal individuals as well as *ihadists*. Figure 3, below, illustrates ISIL's both short, intermediate and long-term goals in the region:

Figure 3: ISIL's anatomy and goals

ISIL's caliph and eliminate the group.

Conclusion: to what extent is America involved in I.S. insurgency?

After acknowledging this complex background that precedes the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, some might be dubious about the extent of America's role in the I.S. rise. In those cases, however, one should not forget that it was the U.S. intervention that completely changed both scenarios in Iraq and Syria. Prior to Bush's arrival in Iraqi ground, a Sunni dictator had been leading the country for decades by defending supposedly non-sectarian, pan-Arabism/nationalists policies. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned in the foregoing sessions, those aspects were not accurate with the country that the Americans found in 2003: economically devastated, segregationist, and politically unstable.

The U.S. invasion turned Iraq's political, economic and social ties upside down. Those who were previously in power, the Sunni Arab community, have witnessed their privileges being taken away from them with their very own eyes. According to the American government discourse, the institutionalization of the new Iraqi state could only be accomplished by means of a complete change in Iraq's superstructure – the set of beliefs, societal mores, and aspects of government and law. This ambitious plan produced deep grievances in the domestic scenario since the first months of the invasion. It is noteworthy that Iraq, even during the Ba'athist regime, had never experienced such sectarian and segregationist policies before. Despite Saddam Hussein's minimum-winning governmental logic and the clientism towards some specific groups, his broader intentions for Iraqi society did not involve the craft of sectarianism or marginalization feelings among different groups. In his mind, it was a "mere historical coincidence" that the Sunnis had to be in power in order to guarantee Iraq's socio-political order. To the former dictator, the maintenance of the nationalist polity was a duty that only the Sunnis, and some Shi'as and other tribal minorities members of the government (NANCE, 2015), could uphold. The U.S. led invasion was responsible for granting Sunni politics a bold sectarian feeling. The 2003 invasion fostered the constructed of a sectarian identity among the Sunni Arabs, based on a common feeling of victimization

The Anglo-American presence, against the odds of the Iraqi inhabitants who were eager to share a common history for the first time, fostered the rise of the Shi'a and Kurds while despising the Sunni presence in medium and high level positions in Iraq. It suffices to say that such choice would certainly come with a price. No one that has ever stayed in touch with power for so long would have been satisfied with peripheral positions in the public sphere.

The *jihadists* responsible for creating the first archetypal organizations of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, like the *Tawhid wal Jihad*, were aware of the Sunni

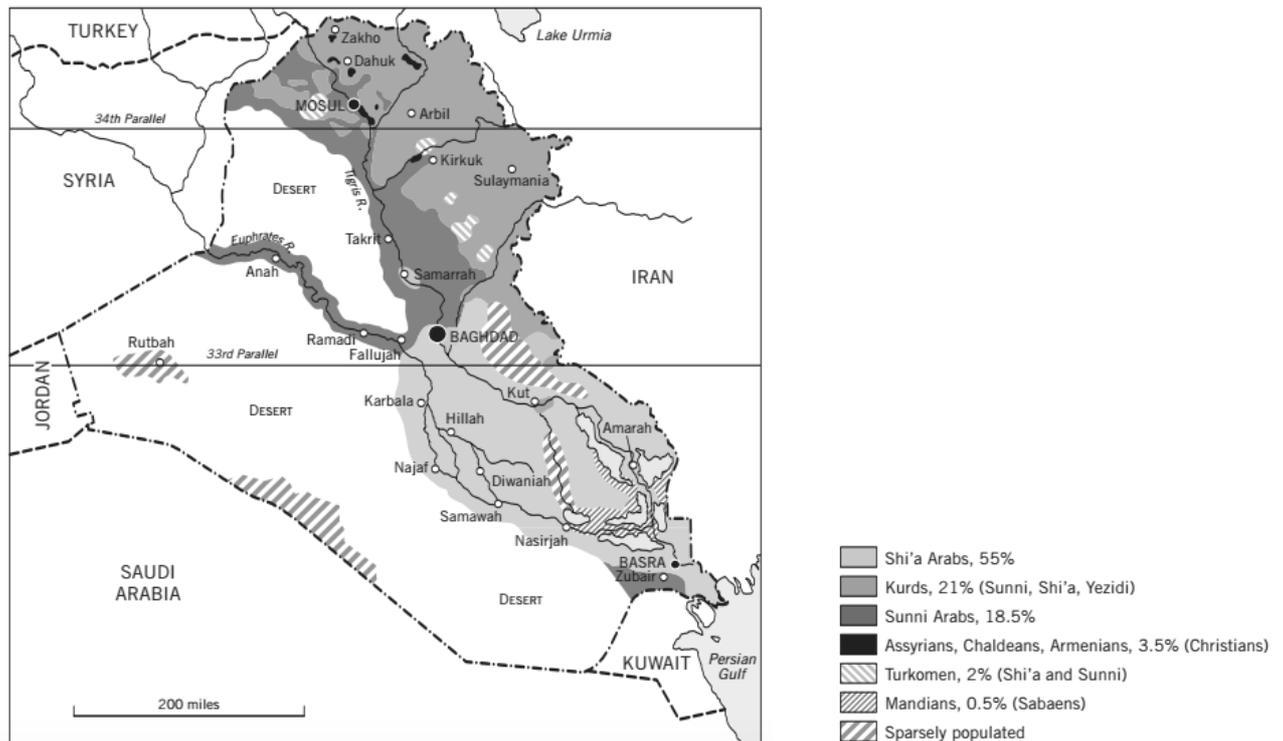
dissatisfaction and resentment about their new social and political situation. Their hatred towards the Americans and the Shi'a ascension was the perfect gateway for the extreme Islamists in order to achieve a civil war against the interveners and the newly enfranchised Shi'a population. Thenceforward, it was only a question of time until the escalation of violence among the groups and the eventual rise of the Islamic State.

With regard to the American ideal of erecting a democratic government in Iraq, it would not be an effortless task considering the lack of compatibility of the Iraqi state with the pre-conditions underlined by the FIRC scholars. Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten (2013) state that democracy is more likely to be achieved in places with (i) increased levels of economic development, (ii) an ethnically homogenous population, and previous experiences with democratic rules (DOWNES; MONTEN, 2013). Whether we take a good look at Iraq's social, political and economic background, it is easy to argue that such democratic aims were bound to fail.

Firstly, economically speaking, since the 1980s Iraq has had financial problems chiefly caused by the expenditure during the eight-year war with Iran and, later, the Gulf War and the sanctions of the United Nations Security Council to Saddam's regime (ALLAWI, 2007). The country ended both wars with huge international debts and a damaged leadership. The civil uprising of 1991 and the loss of the Kuwait war in the same year would only deepen the negative aspects of Iraq's plunging economy.

Second, Iraq's population is quite fragmented. According to the country's demographic map below (figure 4), a Sunni minority population has ruled the country throughout the years in which the Ba'ath government reigned in Iraq – even in the city of Baghdad, where the Shi'a community is a clear majority.

Figure 4: Iraq's demographic map



Source. ALLAWI, 2007.

Lastly, with reference to its political scenario, Iraq has never had any previous democratic experience prior to the U.S. intervention in 2003. Iraq’s government profile is limited to an Ottoman rule experience (1534-1918), which was promptly followed by Britain’s seizure in the aftermath of World War I (1917-1918). The nation’s latest form of government was the one initiated by the Ba’ath Party, which lasted until the 2003 invasion.

U.S. insistency and lack of readiness to recognize that Iraq’s economic and socio-political background were incongruent to its democracy plans was pivotal to the fiasco of the attempt to implant an effective democracy. Besides the unfortunate closure of the mission, America ended up galvanizing extremist thoughts and waves of resentment against the post-2003 new institutional scenario. Consciously or not, the United States was responsible for ISIL’s insurgency – at least when it comes to the weight of the external variables in the rise of the group. It ought to be emphasized, however, that there were extremist Islamist groups in the Sunni Arab community (and other ethnic groups) even before America’s disastrous arrival. Not all of the Sunni individuals were enthusiastic about Saddam’s regime. Despite that, those individuals would have never found such perfect conditions for the rise of a Islamic State if America had not challenge Iraq’s previous status quo in 2003, engendering a wave of hatred and execration in the Sunni population against the U.S. invaders and the newly enfranchised Shi’a community.

Neither U.S. attempts to bring about democracy, through the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the al-Maliki government, nor the amount of resources spent in the nation-building mission were able to make up for the cataclysmic rearrangement

of Iraqi society that was brought by the Americans. Thus, we are left with the following questions: Would ISIL's insurgency happen if the U.S. had not invaded Iraq? Is America the only one to be blamed for? The answers are: "probably not" and "definitely not", respectively. The everlasting clientism system inherent to the Ba'athist regime and the instigation of personalized relationships with certain sectors of the society have also contributed to the final outcome – ISIL. As Matthieu Rey (2015) describes, "the American invasion and the Syrian uprising were apocalyptic moments for both societies [...] they revealed the silent transformations under authoritarian regimes" (REY, 2015, p. 4). Thanks to the cliquish authoritarianism of Saddam Hussein's regime, the erasure of the notion of state brought by the interveners generated a government vacuum in Iraq. The Sunnis (the majority of the insurgency members), left "orphans", were compelled to look for local groups that were able to protect and defend their interests in a completely reorganized and re-territorialized state. The *ihadists* were the first to reach out for this sector of the population.

Thus, these cause and effect relations – prior and after the U.S. invasion – are essential to a holistic understanding of I.S. rise. The removal of the state apparatus in 2003, a nation that Saddam's clique parasitic behavior had completely emptied, bequeathed Iraqi people with no opportunity to build up a state based on a community's sense of shared aspirations. Iraqi inhabitants were left abandoned and unguarded, with no superstructure at all. According to Tareq Ismael and Jacqueline Ismael (2015), "in this train of oppressive rulers taking up residence in Iraq, ISIS is only the latest exemplar" (Y. ISMAEL; S. ISMAEL, 2015, p. 228).

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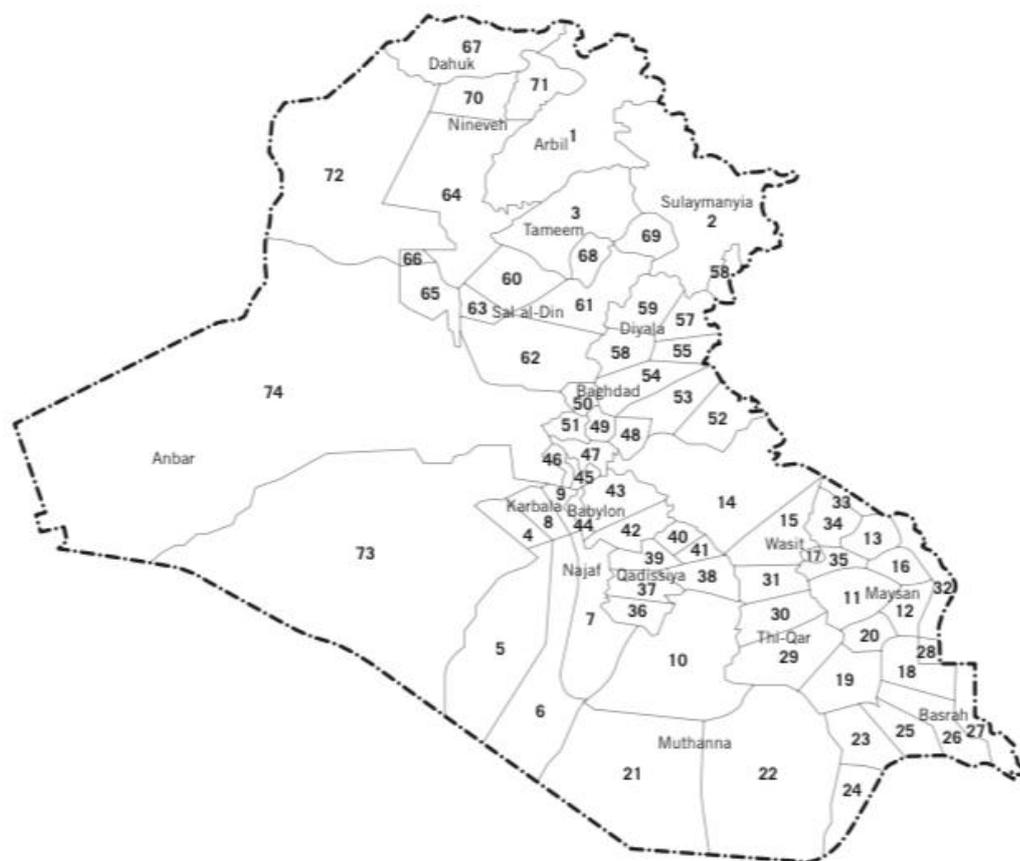
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Appendix 1 – Map of Iraqi Tribes



1 mixture of Kurd tribes	26 Al-Khazraj	51 Dulaim
2 mixture of Kurd tribes	27 none shown	52 Al-Jubour
3 Kurd, Turk, and Arab tribes	28 none shown	53 Al-Ssalhi
4 Al-Glall	29 Al Ribad	54 'Ateeghy
5 Al-Glall	30 Bano Hjaim	55 Al-Qarah
6 Al-Hassan	31 Bano Rikab	56 none shown
7 Unizzah	32 none shown	57 Al-Khazraj
8 Al-Hassan	33 none shown	58 Somaida'
9 Unizzah	34 Al-Sawae'id	59 Al-Nifeesah
10 Unizzah	35 Bano Lam	60 Al-Jubour
11 Abu Muhammed	36 Al-Agr'a	61 Al-Takaretah
12 Al-Ozairij	37 Abu Yaser	62 Al-Ddury
13 Bano Bayat	38 Al-Khaz'il	63 Al-Samarraiyy
14 Al Zorbaid	39 Al-Fatlah	64 Al-Jubour
15 Al Rabi'h	40 Al-Jubour	65 Al-Samarraiyy
16 Abu Timin	41 Al-Laith	66 Al-Samarraiyy
17 Al Rabi'h	42 Al-Hawashim	67 Tkriyy tribes
18 Al-Montifig	43 Al-Janabi	68 Kurd, Turk, Arab tribes
19 Al-Montifig	44 Unizzah	69 mixture of Kurd tribes
20 Al-Montifig	45 Al-Qaraghoul	70 Sinjar
21 Al-Dufoer	46 Dulaim	71 Sinjar
22 Al-Motairat	47 Al-Qaraghoul	72 Shammar
23 Al-Asdi	48 Al-Ssalhi	73 Dulaim
24 Al-Kindy	49 mixture of tribes	74 Dulaim
25 Bano Malik	50 Al-Ddury	

Source: UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq).

Appendix 2 – Map of the Middle East



Source: ALLAWI, 2007.