The Iraq war will always be one of the most debated wars that the United States has participated in. Multiple questions have been raised about the legitimacy and morality of both U.S. occupation of Iraq, and of its departure. Some argue that going to war was a mistake while others argue that ending it was the actual blunder on our part. Clear divisions between liberal and conservative arguments can be seen, with each side focusing on certain specific values. This essay will look into and come to terms with each point of view and the arguments behind them.

The main argument supporting the decision to go to war is undoubtedly that Iraq is no longer under the control of the treacherous dictator Saddam Hussein. One Iraqi journalist wrote that with the removal of Saddam Hussein, he finally felt free to criticize the military regime without fear of retaliation by Hussein’s henchmen. Hussain Abdul-Hussain writes that “the continuing violence in Iraq, even after the U.S. withdrawal, is proof that not all of the Iraqi rage was because of American occupation (Abdul-Hussain, 2016).” Abdul-Hussain also writes that “America handed back to Iraqis a country that, by the standard of the Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern, is closest in the region to being a normal one. Americans paid dearly for that, not only in lives lost, and money spent, but also because of a bruising debate that divided Americans and made them lose faith in their country’s power and role on the world stage (Abdul-Hussain, 2016).” Another article on the subject, written by the editors of the National Review, states that “Saddam Hussein and is regime of mass murder and torture are gone. He started a war by invading a neighbor and sought dominion over the global oil supply. He was an ongoing threat to the region and in flagrant violation of his international commitments (Editors of the National Review, 2013).” The article then went on to say “Even the harshest critics of the war loathe to admit that their alternative would have left Saddam atop Iraq.”

A key argument against the war is the amount of unrest it left in the Middle East. One China Daily article states that “The anarchy that rules Somalia and large parts of Afghanistan and Yemen should give an idea about what Iraq could turn into. The chaos and mayhem that followed the ‘Arab Spring’ in Libya, Egypt and Syria also show Western leaders don't care about the fate of the people in other countries (Yang, 2016).” Another article by Ransa Warah says that “They justified their actions by claiming that the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and was harbouring Al Qaeda. None of these claims were found to be true. On the contrary, Saddam's ouster paved the path for Al Qaeda to lay down roots in Iraq, something that would have been inconceivable during his regime (Warah, 2016).”

For the most part, the conservative perspective on the war is that the United States withdrew from Iraq too early. The war was widely supported by the public at the start, with the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 still fresh in everyone’s minds. When no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, the U.S. changed its objective to fighting the military regime of Saddam Hussein and creating a democracy. While the removal of Saddam Hussein was accomplished, things were left in a sort of chaos in Iraq after Barrack Obama withdrew troops. Some say that this caused power struggles that allowed terrorist groups like ISIS to gain control. Many conservatives argue that because of a campaign promise made by Obama to pull all troops out of Iraq, the U.S. wasn’t able to finish what it had started. The two articles supporting the United States’ decision to go to war highlighted the value of looking at the whole picture. Even though resources were exhausted and lives were lost, a ruthless regime was overthrown. Each article examines the importance of what the U.S. was able to accomplish in Iraq even these accomplishments can be overlooked.

On the other side, the arguments against the war come from liberals who say that the entire war was a mistake, and fought for the wrong reasons. Catastrophic totals of innocent Iraqi people lost their lives because of the fighting. Not only did people in Iraq suffer, but the United States spent countless resources and lost just as many lives for a war that many people now say was not fought for a legitimate cause. After no Weapons of Mass Destruction were found in Iraq, the U.S. continued to occupy Iraq and changed the entire focus of the war. The absence of WMD’s in Iraq allowed for an easy decision of the public to turn against the war. The two anti-war articles both highlight the chaos in Iraq that followed United States occupation. The articles value responsibility and integrity, drawing attention to the fact that countless lives were destroyed just to leave Iraq in a state of ruin.

In my opinion, in addition to the destruction and violence, the war left America wounded in another way. As expressed by Abdul-Hussain, the war divided Americans. People have not slowed their arguing over the justification of the Iraq war at all since troops were pulled from Iraq. People of differing political identification or with differing sets of beliefs are unwilling to compromise with each other and see all points of an opinion. Liberals can’t recognize that the war ended a ruthless dictatorship and conservatives can’t come to terms with the idea that the war destroyed lives and created chaos. The removal of Saddam Hussein created opportunities for the Iraqi people, and U.S. withdrawal returned troops to their families and put a stop to the exhaustion of resources. I am of the opinion that people who agree with points from multiple sides of an argument are not pushovers or fence-riders who can’t make up their mind, but rather are coherent individuals who are capable of keeping an open mind and do not seek out confrontation. Perhaps if more people were able to think like this more often, the Iraq war would not have left America so distressed, angry, or confused.

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