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Bachelor's thesis

Morgenthau's View on the Iraq War

The Return of Moral Realism in International Politics

May 2020

NTNU

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Sociology and Political Science



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Preface

This thesis concludes my bachelor study in Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. This has been a journey from a rather sketchy idea of analyzing historical wicked problems in US foreign policy. This developed into an investigation of the realists' view of the Iraq War, driven by a discovery and fascination of Hans Morgenthau and his way of thinking. I was particularly inspired by his pragmatic and nuanced approach for analyzing real-world challenges as well as his political foresight and courage to morally challenge unwise political decisions.

I will thank professor Jo Jakobsen for invaluable guiding, with prompt and thorough feedback throughout the semester. I will also thank my dear partner, Vivian, who has shown great patience and support throughout the process.

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Odd Ivar Lindland

Abstract

The Iraq War was controversial and proved to one of the worst US foreign policy decisions. The Bush administration's justification for the war was largely articulated in the Bush Doctrine that represented a new US grand strategy. The objective of the doctrine was to remove threats like terrorism and threats from evil states, one of which Iraq was depicted. The Bush administration claimed that this threat could not be controlled, and a preventive war was necessary. The realist school strongly disagreed with this view. The primary argument against an invasion was that the Iraq threat was exaggerated and could be contained. One of the more vocal critics, the structural realist John Mearsheimer, emphasized that balance of power is more likely a means and an end than the bandwagoning strategy that the neoconservative influence of the Bush Doctrine promoted. Further, an invasion any aggression and prolonged against Iraq would face strong opposition among the Iraqi people since it would trigger nationalistic counterforces if democracy is externally imposed.

While structural realism highlights the distribution of power between states, the founder of classical realism, Hans Morgenthau, has a more complex and nuanced perspective on how political leaders should think and act. Morgenthau's version of realism, which I have chosen to call Moral Realism, has clear normative and moral elements inspired by Aristotle's virtue ethics. Hence, moral leadership of statesmen is linked to their virtues. Furthermore, Morgenthau argues that all political decisions are unique choices among evil alternatives. A political leader must choose the lesser evil option based on a prudent assessment of alternative solutions to a problem or a situation.

In this thesis I have analyzed Morgenthau's Moral Realism and discussed how Morgenthau's views and arguments would have been expressed in the context of the Iraq War. By referring to the Vietnam War, of which Morgenthau was a strong critic, he would probably join the other realists in the opposition to the Iraq War. While Mearsheimer in a similar analysis emphasized the above structural arguments, I would argue that Morgenthau would have used elements of his Moral Realism more explicitly and strongly opposed the moral rationale for the war. He would probably argue that the Bush administration neither had performed a prudent decision-making process nor had chosen the lesser evil option.

Sammendrag

Irak-krigen var kontroversiell og en av de dårligste amerikanske utenrikspolitiske beslutningene i moderne tid. Bush-administrasjonens begrunnelse for krigen var i stor grad tuftet på Bush-doktrinen som representerte en betydelig endring i amerikansk utenrikspolitikk. Målet med doktrinen var å fjerne trusler fra terrorisme og 'onde' stater som Irak ble fremstilt som. Bush-administrasjonen hevdet at disse truslene ikke kunne demmes opp mot og at en forebyggende krig var nødvendig. Realistene var sterkt uenig i dette synet. Det viktigste argumentet mot en invasjon var at Irak-trusselen var overdrevet og kunne isoleres. En av de sterkeste kritikerne, strukturrealisten John Mearsheimer, la vekt på at maktbalanse var et mer sannsynlig virkemiddel og utfall enn båndtvangsstrategien som den nykonservative innflytelsen på Bush-doktrinen fremmet. Videre ville en invasjon av Irak møte sterk motstand blant det irakiske folket, siden det ville utløse nasjonalistiske motkrefter når demokrati ble forsøkt innført med makt.

Mens strukturell realisme fremhever maktfordelingen mellom stater, har den klassiske realismens grunnlegger, Hans Morgenthau, et mer komplekst og nyansert perspektiv på hvordan politiske ledere skal tenke og handle. Morgenthaus versjon av realisme, som jeg har valgt å kalle *moralrealisme*, har tydelige normative og moralske elementer som er inspirert av Aristoteles dydsetikk. Sentralt her er at politiske ledes moral er knyttet opp til deres karaktertrekk. Videre hevder Morgenthau at alle politiske beslutninger er unike valg blant 'onde' alternativer. En politisk leder må velge det minst onde alternativet basert på en innsiktsfull og forsvarlig vurdering av alternative løsninger på et problem eller en situasjon.

I denne oppgaven har jeg analysert det jeg kaller Morgenthaus moralrealisme og diskutert hvordan Morgenthaus syn og argumenter ville ha blitt uttrykt i forbindelse med Irak-krigen. Med henvisning til Vietnamkrigen, som Morgenthau var en sterk motstander av, ville han sannsynligvis også vært en tydelig motstander av Irak-krigen. Mens Mearsheimer i en lignende analyse la vekt på de ovennevnte strukturelle argumenter, vil jeg hevde at Morgenthau ville ha brukt elementer fra det jeg kaller moralrealisme mer eksplisitt og vært sterkt imot den moralske begrunnelsen for krigen. Han ville sannsynligvis hevdet at Bush-administrasjonen verken utførte en forsvarlig beslutningsprosess eller valgte det minst onde alternativet.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale for the thesis

On 19 March 2003 President George W. Bush ordered a US-led invasion of Iraq and initiated a war that lasted for almost a decade – *the Iraq War*. The Bush administration raised three main arguments for why the invasion was necessary. First, the war would prevent Iraq from obtaining weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Second, it would end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism. Finally, the war would liberate the Iraqi people from an authoritarian ruler and introduce democracy and liberalism after Western principles (Jervis, 2003). The Iraq War decision was well anchored in the so-called *Bush Doctrine* that represented a radical shift in US foreign policy as a response to the attack on 9/11 2001 and perceived threats from terrorist groups and rogue states. It is argued that the doctrine was influenced by *neoconservatism* that provided an ideological platform for going to war (Fukuyama, 2006; Schmidt & Williams, 2008). Neoconservatism views United States as having a universal obligation to *unilaterally spread democracy and liberalism*, as well as allowing for *preventive wars* to conquer apparent threats to US interests (Mearsheimer, 2005).

The Iraq War was controversial (Gerecht, 2002; Russel, 2002; Scowcroft, 2002). Although the war had wide support from the US Congress, the debate among nongovernmental intellectuals was more polarized (Purdum, 2003). Many scholars from the *realism* school of thought, except from Kissinger, challenged the Bush administration's idea and justification for the Iraq War and warned about its consequences prior to the invasion (Jervis, 2003; Kirschner, 2003; Kissinger, 2002; Mearsheimer & Walt 2003). The main arguments were that the war would be unnecessary, since the threat from Iraq was exaggerated and that could be contained by a deterrence strategy. Further, a war would be counterproductive and potentially undermine war of terrorism and make non-proliferation of nuclear weapons more challenging. Also, externally enforced democracy bears a risk of failure because of nationalistic counterforces (Jervis, 2003; Kirschner; 2003; Kissinger, 2002; Mearsheimer & Walt 2003).

Mearsheimer, a stern critic of the Iraq War, has written an essay where he discusses how Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980), the founding father of modern realism, would view the Iraq War (Mearsheimer, 2005). Mearsheimer argues that Morgenthau would have been equally vocal in his opposition to an Iraq invasion as he was when criticizing United States' role in the Vietnam War. Mearsheimer's focus in the essay is concentrated on the cleavage between realism and neoconservatism and how structural forces in international politics should be understood. On

one side, neoconservatism argues for a *bandwagon logic* underpinned by externally enforced regime change and democracy. On the other side, realism and Morgenthau would reject this view and argue for that *balance of power* between rival states and the strength of nationalism will be the decisive forces in defending a state's self-determination. The essay emphasizes on the themes that basically echoes Mearsheimer's own school of thought – *structural realism* (Mearsheimer, 2001; Mearsheimer, 2005).

Morgenthau's perspective of international politics is often portrayed as a pessimistic view on human nature and human's struggle for power. Such a description is a gross simplification. It is a rather more complex and nuanced version of realism inspired from several classical philosophers and thinkers (Bain,2000; Cozette, 2009; Cristol, 2009; Jervis, 2009; Wong, 2000). Since Morgenthau's perspective of international relations has normative and moral elements, strongly inspired by Aristotle's virtue ethics (Ameriks & Clarke, 2000). I will denote his moral thinking and *Six Principles of Realism* ("Six Principles") as *Moral Realism*¹ (Morgenthau, [2006]1948). This perspective claims that political decisions are unique choices among evil alternatives. A political leader should prudently reason on relevant and reliable information about a problem or situation and analyze the solution alternatives in order to conclude on the *lesser evil* alternative (Molloy, 2009; Russell, 2007).

By appreciating this moral perspective, a different analysis of Morgenthau's view on the Iraq War can be justified. In this thesis I will perform a thought experiment of an imaginary argumentation that Morgenthau would make on the Iraq War. I will base this on an analysis of the core elements Morgenthau's Moral Realism.

More precisely, the research questions will be:

Could Morgenthau principles of classical realism and his moral philosophy join the realist opposition to the Iraq invasion? If so, what kind of arguments would he have used? How does these arguments compare to the arguments other realists used and how can Morgenthau's view complement or enforce these arguments?

In order to address these questions, I will rely on a range of literature that documents the arguments of the Bush administration, as well as arguments from various scholars warning about the war. Further, prominent scholars that have made valuable and nuanced interpretations

¹ Moral Realism is philosophical theory that emphasizes the ethic and objective elements of written text or in oral communication (Russ Shafer-Landau, 2015, p. 271). Related to international politics, the term has been used to explain Morgenthau's version of realism (Brostrom, 2016; Philpott, 2002).

of Morgenthau's principles will be used to supplement my own understanding of his Moral Realism.

The Iraq War has been thoroughly analyzed by many scholars in international politics. Except from the abovementioned essay made of Mearsheimer, I have not been able to find analysis that have specifically viewed the Iraq invasion from an explicit interpretation of Morgenthau's Moral Realism. Thus, this thesis may provide valuable insight into how Morgenthau's perspective and theory can be interpreted and applied in contemporary international politics.

In short, I hope to show that Morgenthau's normative and moral approach to understand and to guide political leaders is most relevant and should justify both awareness and appreciation.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. In Section 2 I present the basis for the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003; what were the key elements in the Bush Doctrine, its influence from neoconservatism, and the administration's key arguments for the invasion. In Section 3 I summarize the main principles of the realist school of thought and how realist scholars argued against the Iraq invasion. In Section 4 I present my interpretation of the core elements of Morgenthau's Moral Realism. Further, I review the essay of Mearsheimer where he discusses which arguments Morgenthau would have used in his likely opposition to the Iraq invasion. Based on my understanding of Morgenthau's Moral Realism, I will elaborate on what type of arguments he likely would have used in connection with the Iraq War. A brief comparison with the analysis of Mearsheimer will be made. Section 5 summarizes the main observations and findings related to the research question(s) and proposes potential topics for further work.

2 The Bush administration's justification for the Iraq War

In this section I will present the Bush administration's justification for the Iraq War, the Bush Doctrine and its influence from neoconservatism, as well as which specific arguments that the administration promoted. First, I will briefly review US national interest and change in grand strategy and what role the Middle-East has played in US foreign policy.

2.1 US national interests and grand strategy

United States' *grand strategy* describes the overall principles and approach to its foreign policy and how its *national interests* best can be served. Most Americans, with various priorities, will claim that United States has many long-term national interests, but may be influenced by short term events and trends (Gholz, Press, & Sapolsky, 1997, p.7). However, *security*, *prosperity*, and *domestic liberty* stand out as three core and durable interest (Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth, 2013).

The grand strategy has been influenced by the world conflict situations and levels, its perceived overall threats, its own ambitions and interests as well as its relative power to other great powers. Broadly speaking, the strategy has ranged from *isolationism* to *primacy* (Hook & Spanier, 2019). There is an ongoing debate among contemporary scholars whether *restraint* or *engagement* is the better strategy to serve US national interests (Brooks et al.,2013; Gholz et al., 1997; Mearsheimer, 2019; Posen, 2007; Walt, 2019).

The United States' interest in the Middle-East grew after World War II. It was initially linked to US' containment strategy in order to prevent the spread of communism into the region. Later, the interest was more related to the access to and control over oil resources in the region, given the huge demand for this resource from the US economy and its consumers, and US' historical limited supply of this resource (Gholz & Press, 2010; Glaser & Kelanic, 2017).

The interests in the Middle-East have been backed up by significant presence in the region, as well as large economic and military support to allies like Israel and the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia. The relationships to the two main states in the region, Iran and Iraq, have been complex. During the Iran-Iraq War lasting from 1980 till 1988, Iraq and Saddam Hussein gained support from United States, given the Islamic revolution and strong anti-US stand by the Iranian leader Khomeini. The support faded throughout the eighties. When Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait in August 1990 on a dispute of oil quotas, a US-led coalition initiated the Operation Desert Storm in January 1991 against Iraq in order to defend Kuwait and as well as its own oil interest.

The operation was swift, and *The Gulf War* ended in February 1991 with a decisive victory for the coalition. However, it stopped short of changing the regime of Iraq.

Although the Gulf War was regarded as a just and successful operation, its architect President Georg Bush was not, mainly due to domestic economic factors, re-elected in 1992. In the 2000 Election, however, the Republican candidate returned to power, when Georg W Bush was elected as the 43th President of the United States. In contrast to his father, George W Bush had little foreign policy experience. To compensate for this, several influential figures from his father's administration were appointed and should play important roles in forming the new foreign policy. The strongest influencers were Vice President Cheney, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. They were all members of the *Project for a New American Century* that sent an open letter to President Clinton in January 1998 advocating for a regime change in Iraq (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 193).

Soon after Bush was established in the White House, United States experienced the dramatic terror attack on 9/11 2001. This event should change the US grand strategy significantly, form the rationale for the Bush Doctrine, and represent the important backdrop for the Iraq War (Daalder & Lindsey, 2003).

2.2 The Bush Doctrine

The Bush Doctrine consists of four major pillars (Jervis, 2002, p. 365). First, the doctrine strongly promotes ideological values of *democracy and liberalism*. By spreading these values, by force if necessary, the entire world will be benefitted, and all participating nations will experience freedom and safety echoing Kant's vision of perpetual peace (Hurrel, 1990; Hurrel, 2002). Second, the doctrine focuses on the new threats that terrorist groups and rogue states represented, potentially with access to weapons of mass destruction. The administration pinpointed three states as the *axis of evil*, Iran, North-Korea and Iraq. These states were regarded as real threats to US and its allies, either directly or through blackmailing. Since deterrence was argued not to be an effective strategy against these threats, the doctrine stated that it is advisable and justifiable to eliminate the threat by *preventive wars*. Third, the doctrine acknowledged that US *unilateralism* is inevitable in order to carry out preventive wars, since support for preventive wars from traditional allies could be challenging. Finally, the fourth pillar in the doctrine is US *hegemony* or *primacy*. It is the confirmation of US as the dominant unipolar actor in the post Cold War world order manifested in superior military capabilities and spending, economic position and global influence (Jervis, 2003).

It has been widely argued that the Bush Doctrine was largely influenced by key elements of *neoconservatism* (Fukuyama, 2006; Schmidt & Williams, 2008). “More than any other group, it was the neoconservatives both inside and outside the Bush administration who pushed for democratizing Iraq and the broader Middle East” (Fukuyama, 2006, p.63). “The neoconservative vision of American foreign policy provided the theoretical and policy content of the Bush Doctrine, which in turn underpinned the decision to invade Iraq in 2003” (Schmidt & Williams, 2008, p. 196). Neoconservatism is a political ideology that emerged in the United States in the late 1930s. It is rooted in conservatism and advocates the promotion of democracy and interventionism in international affairs (Wolfson, 2004, p. 228). Mearsheimer labels neoconservatism, and the Bush Doctrine, as “Wilsonianism with teeth”. On the one hand, it emphasizes the ideological basis promoted by president Wilson focusing on universal moral values, liberalism, freedom and spread of democracy. On the other hand, it highlights the United States’ capability and will to use military power to support these ideas (Mearsheimer, 2005). Consequently, the Bush Doctrine assumes a *bandwagoning logic*. By possessing and eventually using its superior military power, adversaries will concede to the threat of being attacked and will fall in line with United States.

To further explain the how the Bush Doctrine was used in the promotion of the Iraq invasion, I will highlight some specific statements from president Bush prior to the final invasion decision, as well as the main arguments of the Bush administration.

2.3 The main arguments for the Iraq War

Just a few months after the 9/11 attack, Iraq was put in the spotlight during the president’s annual State of the Union Address 29 January 2002. During this statement, the tone was aggressive and the message decisive. The main claim was that Iraq supported and harbored terrorist groups and that it was on a path to develop weapons of mass destruction. The Address left an unmistakable impression that diplomatic efforts had been abandoned and that a decision to use military force likely had been made. “History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight...” (Bush, 2002a).

In a graduation speech at the military academy West Point on June 1 2002, president Bush repeated the message of urgent action. This time he highlighted that strategies like deterrence and containment were not effective towards Iraq and that preventive measures could be necessary.

Deterrence -- the promise of massive retaliation against nations -- means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies [...] In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act (Bush, 2002b).

On September 17, 2002, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* was published (Bush, 2002c). This formed the official statements of the Bush Doctrine. A more specific set of arguments was summed up 16 October 2002, when the US Congress sanctioned the use of military force against Iraq. (US Congress, 2002). Three major arguments were put forward. The first major argument was to prevent Iraq to develop weapons of mass destruction or nuclear weapons. Bush administration highlighted Iraq's unwillingness to let inspectors from the international energy agency get free access to all relevant site of potential enrichment capacities. The second major argument was Iraq's alleged link to terrorist groups like Al Qaida and that participants for the 9/11 attack had been trained by Iraqi forces. Moreover, support to the terrorist organization continued to exist and expand. The third argument was related to regime change and liberation. By toppling Iraq's authoritarian leader and revise its governance structure, the Bush administration believed this would pave the way for democracy in Iraq and potentially in order parts of the Middle-East. This view supported the Bush administration belief in the bandwagoning strategy and it would strengthen United States' strategic interest in the Middle-East. "Mr. Wolfowitz sees a "liberated Iraq" as a vanguard of democracy, the first potential piece in a kind of reverse domino theory in which the United States could help foster the fall of authoritarian regimes in a reshaped Middle East -- 50 years after it began fighting to keep pro-Western regimes from falling in Asia" (Purdum, 2003) Also, a regime change in Iraq would 'finish the business' that hawks like Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld had argued for to the Clinton administration in 1998 (Kessler, 2003).

In addition to these key arguments, the Bush administration often promoted a moral justification. It grew out of the notions of *axis of evil* and *war on terror* where the states or actors in the world are divided into either good or evil ones. According to Bush, the good forces, led by the United States, had a moral right and obligation to remove the evil forces in the world. United States should be the savior or moral crusader and could use any means to achieve victory (McCartney, 2004).

In addition to these explicitly stated arguments for the Iraq War, it is assumed that protection of the US oil interest in the region played a role. However, this factor may be less direct as the case was for the Gulf War (Glaser & Kelanic, 2017, p. 128).

Let us now turn the focus to the most vocal critics against the Iraq War.

3 Realism and realists' arguments against the Iraq War

In this section I will summarize the main elements and strands of the realism school in international politics and how arguments from the realist scholars were used in opposition to the Iraq War. An analysis of Morgenthau's Moral Realism will be made in Section 4.

3.1 Realism

Realism views relationships among sovereign states as a competitive power struggle. Focus is on survival and self-help in the Westphalian anarchic system with no structure or actor that governs the interstate relationships and behavior. The basic realist ideas and assumptions are: i) a pessimistic view of human nature, ii) international relations are conflictual and ultimately resolved by war, iii) high regard for values of national security and state survival, and iv) a basic skepticism that there can be progress of international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life (Jackson & Sørensen, 2007). Realism exists in different versions, where the (neo)-classical and structural realisms are the two main strands.

Classical realism is rooted back to Thucydides and his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides, 1925), Hobbes in *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1951/2016) and Machiavelli in the *Prince* (Machiavelli, 1532/2008). Just before the Second World War and as a reaction to the failed vision of international politics provided by president Woodrow Wilson's utopianism, including the League of Nations, E H Carr published *The Twenty Years of Crisis* (Carr, 1939/2016). This created a renewed attention to the realism school, but it was *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* of Morgenthau just after the Second World that brought classical realism to the forefront of analyzing international relations (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948]).

Structural realism emphasizes the relative power between the states in the anarchic state system. The structure and the behavior of other relevant states forms the foreign policy of a state, and thus how international politics are conducted. The balance of power among the great powers defines the core structure of the system, its polarity and subsequent stability. There are two main version of structural realism: i) defensive realism and ii) offensive realism. Defensive realism, promoted by Waltz emphasizing on maximizing a state's *security* in a competition

among other states (Waltz, 2010). Offensive realism claims that the best strategy for great powers main ambition is to maximize its *power* (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Though classical realism and structural realism provide different focus for explaining international relations, they share a common platform. In addition to the power dimension that is often emphasized, realists are cautious in using military force to resolve disputes between states. This was evident in the arguments before the Iraq invasion.

3.2 Realists and other scholar's opposition to the Iraq War

There were many vocal voices from the realist strand that strongly opposed an invasion of Iraq. Two of the most prominent realists, Mearsheimer and Walt, argued that the war would be unnecessary (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003). They claimed that Bush' arguments of the ineffectiveness of containment and deterrence towards Saddam Hussein were invalid. By referring to past successful experiences, they strongly argued for that deterrence could work. Iraq's military power, also if Iraq was in position to build or even have nuclear capability, was effectively balanced with US direct presence in the region and with support of allies. They also dismissed the argument that Saddam Hussein would behave irrational or reckless. Previous decisions Hussein had made, Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait invasion, were rational decisions from a realist point of view. Further, they did not believe Iraq posed a large enough threat to United States' vital interest that could justify a war. They continued to argue that potential blackmailing was no real threat and that a nuclear threat was not imminent. These arguments were backed by other scholars (Kirschner, 2003; Knopf, 2002). Finally, they claimed that a war could be counterproductive and potentially undermine war of terrorism and make non-proliferation of nuclear weapons more challenging (Kirschner, 2003; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003). The core of the arguments is based on the ideological cleavage between realism and neoconservatism. I will elaborate further on this in Section 4.2.

Galston emphasized that a war would damage the US interests and have dire post-war consequences. He claimed that a war against Iraq "is nothing less than a fundamental shift in America's place in the world [...] new rules of international engagement without the consent of other nations. In my judgment, this new stance would ill serve the long-term interests of the United States." (Galston, 2002, p.2). He continues: "We would assume total responsibility for Iraq's territorial integrity, for the security and basic needs of its population, and for the reconstruction of its system of governance and political culture. This would require an occupation measured in years or even decades." (Galston, 2002, p.2).

Kissinger, a legend in US and international politics, was one of the very few realist supporters of war. However, he had his doubts and he recognized the dramatic change in US policy that an invasion represented. Further, he stated that “the new approach is revolutionary. Regime change as a goal for military intervention challenges the international system established by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia” (Kissinger, 2002). In hindsight, he admitted that he had underestimated the scope of the war. “I supported the decision to undertake regime change in Iraq. I had doubts, expressed in public and governmental forums, about expanding it to nation-building and giving such a universal scope” (Kissinger, 2014, p. 324).

Some media commentators and scholars questioned the thoroughness of the decision process prior to the invasion. Kessler labelled the process ‘murky’ (Kessler, 2003). Sanger stated that the Bush administration exaggerated the threat by “[portraying] the Iraqi threat as one so large and so imminent that it challenges America's survival - an argument his critics were already saying tonight was exaggerated to justify a preventive war.” (Sanger, 2003). Other scholars have analyzed the decision process of the Bush administration and claim a series of shortcomings (Michaels & Massoud, 2009; Pfiffner, 2009).

Although not central in the realists’ argumentation, the economic and legal aspects of the war were voiced, but largely ignored by the Bush administration. The budget numbers from their economic advisor Lindsay for a war was in the range of 100 to 200 billion USD (Bilmes & Stiglitz, 2011), whereas Bush administration in public stated that the cost could be in the range of 50 to 60 billion USD (Bilmes & Stiglitz, 2011). Both set of numbers turned out to be a gross underestimation. A more in-depth analysis of made by Nordhaus at ‘National Bureau of Economic Research’ stated that “The estimates of the cost to the United States over the decade following hostilities range from \$ 100 billion to \$1.9 trillion” (Nordhaus, 2002, p.1). Later analysis of the real cost of the Iraq War documents even higher figures than the ones provided by Nordhaus (Bilmes & Stiglitz, 2011).

The Bush administration claimed that the war could be legally justified, since “it would enforce previous UN resolutions in the face of Iraqi defiance” (Luban, 2004, p. 207). The Iraq War was acknowledged to be preventive, meaning that it was waged to destroy a potential threat that was not imminent or known to be planned. In general, the legal foundation for a preventive war, according to the Just War framework, is questionable (Luban, 2004, p. 213). In an assessment by Enemark and Michaelsen, the legal justification for the war could not be made. The overall conclusion was:

An analysis of the invasion of Iraq in the framework of Just War doctrine shows that the Coalition's military campaign was unjust. The Just Cause of self-defense was built on the uncertain foundation of intelligence alone and the Coalition could not establish that alleged Iraqi WMD and links to terrorism were a sufficiently imminent threat to warrant pre-emptive action. (Enemark & Michaelsen, 2005, p.562).

Cordesman et al. sums up most of the anti-war arguments in a sarcastic manner. The Bush administration had been afflicted by syndromes, like 'Best case war', 'Democracy solves everything', 'No exit strategy', etc. According to Cordesman et al. these syndromes were symptoms of a disease that the Bush administration needed a cure for (Cordesman et al., 2002).

Despite brave efforts, the arguments from realists and other anti-war actors, didn't have much impact on the Bush administration. Nor did it trigger a massive public opposition, as was the case during the Vietnam War. The moral arguments were basically owned by the Bush administration and were not sufficiently challenged.

Could Morgenthau have brought new and more convincing arguments into the public discourse?

4 Morgenthau's View on the Iraq War

In this section, I will analyze how Morgenthau would have assessed the Iraq War and which arguments he probably would have used. I will briefly introduce him and his main academic work. I will emphasize the essence of his moral philosophy and the *Six Principles of Realism* ("Six Principles") and denote the combination *Moral Realism*.

4.1 Hans Morgenthau – a short introduction

Hans Morgenthau is the most prominent scholar from the classical realist school in the 20th century. He was born in Germany in 1904 and emigrated to United States in 1937, where he worked till his death in 1980. During most of his career he held a professor position in political science at University of Chicago. He combined an active academic career with different engagements in the US governments. He was consultant to the US Department of State during both the Kennedy administration and the Johnson administration. He became a public figure during the Vietnam War because of his increasingly vocal opposition to the war expressed in op-eds and chronicles in leading publications and newspapers. Morgenthau initially supported the containment of a potential communist expansion. As the US involvement in Vietnam escalated, he became more concerned with the moral aspects of the war, and its potential

damage to US national interest. Towards the end of the war, he saw himself as a dissenter and anti-war activist, leading the Johnson administration to terminate his engagement (Rafshoon, 2001; See, 2001; Zambenardi, 2011).

Morgenthau's political theories are expressed *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (Morgenthau, 1947) and *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Morgenthau, [2006]1948). The former book discusses limitations in science and technology to provide solutions to political and social problems. Although Morgenthau is an empiricist and asserts that knowledge and actions should be based on sense impressions and reason, he acknowledges that non-rational and even irrational forces in human nature may disturb any decision process (Wong, 2000). *Politics Among Nations* is his most influential and well-known contribution to the field of political science. The opening pages of the book provides his philosophical ideas behind classical realism and where he introduces the Six Principles. Further, he highlights the main differences between realism and liberalism. Liberalism is, according to Morgenthau, based on a vision that "rational and moral political order, derived from universally valid principles, can be achieved here and now." (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 3). He is convinced that such a vision is impossible. Realism promotes a more pragmatic approach to international relations, acknowledging the complexity of human nature. To improve the world one "must work with, not against, the forces in human nature, [...] moral principles can never be fully realized, but must at best be approximated" (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 3).

When his principles of realism are introduced in academic textbooks, it is common to emphasize his pessimistic description of the human nature beings and states struggle for power to support their national interests. Thus, it is portrayed as a revitalization of the classical works of Thucydides, Hobbes, and Machiavelli (Jackson & Sørensen, 2007, p. 67-68). Such a description is a gross simplification. Morgenthau's version of realism is complex and nuanced and has both a descriptive and normative dimension.

A growing number of scholars have investigated the normative dimension and the moral aspects underpinning his realism principles (Bain 2000; Cozette, 2008; Cristol, 2009; Jervis, 1994; Molloy, 2004; Wong 2000). His moral thinking is inspired by a range of famous philosophers and scholars: Aristotle (Lang, 2007; Mollov, 2009), Augustine (Murray, 1998), Epicuros (Molloy, 2009), Niebuhr (Mollov, 2009), Nietzsche (Gismondi, 2004), Plato (Pin-Fat,2005), and Weber (Gismondi, 2004; Mollov, 2009, Williams, 2004).

Before discussing how Morgenthau would have assessed the justification for the Iraq War, I will extract the key elements of his normative and moral thinking and focus on his inspiration from Aristotle.

4.2 Key elements of Morgenthau's moral philosophy

I will emphasize three main elements Morgenthau's moral philosophy. First, he states that the key moral principle is the concept of *lesser evil* (Molloy, 2004; Russel, 2007). The lesser evil alternative is a fixed, non-relativistic, universal concept, based on the assumption that all alternatives related to a political decision process contain a certain degree of evil - *the ubiquity of evil* (Molloy, 2009). The moral duty of the leader should be to choose the lesser evil alternative, implicitly for the greater good. When asked "how much moral must a man act in the political sphere?", Morgenthau responds:

[T]he best he can do is to minimize the intrinsic immorality of the political act. He must choose from among the political actions at his disposal the one which is likely to do the least violence to the commands of Christian ethics. The moral strategy of politics is, then, to try to choose the lesser evil (Morgenthau, 1962).

The second moral principle is *prudence* which is influenced by Aristotle's virtue ethics (Ameriks & Clarke, 2000; Lang, 2007; Molloy, 2009). Virtue ethics emphasizes that an act or decision is driven by a set of virtues or character dispositions to a person. Virtues are not only to act good for one's own sake, but also for a common good. The ultimate moral virtue is prudence. Prudence is excellence in prioritizing or selecting the appropriate means when deciding and acting in a specific situation. It is about taking the right choice in all human situations based on deliberation and reasoning. Thus, it depends on the capability to bring in all relevant knowledge that matter to a specific situation. Further, prudence builds on the Golden Mean as a guiding principle that strikes a proper a balance between opposite vices. Moderation and proportion should be strongly encouraged. Morgenthau warns of the risk of overconfidence in human judgement or capabilities, hubris, since it may lead to unwise or unproportional decisions (Molloy, 2009).

Third, Morgenthau challenges of the concept of *dual morality*. This concept means that there is one set of moral principles for public sphere and another set for the private sphere. Jackson and Sørensen claim that "Morgenthau follows in the tradition of Thucydides and Machiavelli: there is one morality for the private sphere and another very different morality for the public sphere" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2007, p. 67-68). I will dispute this view, since Morgenthau explicitly

emphasizes the unity of moral evaluation, which is consistent with Aristotelean ethics and that moral acts can only be linked to the character of a person. “Distinguishing between the acts of states and individuals is, according to Morgenthau, “a formidable perversion of the moral sense itself, an acquiescence in evil” (Molloy, 2009, p. 99).

I will expand on these elements in Section 4.4, but first I will present the main elements of a similar analysis that Mearsheimer has made.

4.3 Mearsheimer’s view on Morgenthau’s arguments against the Iraq War

In an essay titled *Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism versus neo-conservatism*, Mearsheimer discusses if Morgenthau would have opposed the invasion and what his key arguments would be (Mearsheimer, 2005).

First, Mearsheimer asserts that Morgenthau most likely would oppose an Iraq invasion, by referring to his strong opposition of the Vietnam War. “...given his [Morgenthau] theory of international politics, his opposition to the Vietnam war and the parallels between the two conflicts, it is highly likely.” (Mearsheimer, 2005, p.1)

As the title indicates, the essay focuses on the overall ideological differences between realism, represented by Morgenthau, and neoconservatism, represented by the Bush administration. Mearsheimer claims that Morgenthau would emphasize the cleavage between realism and neo-conservatism and how structural forces in international politics should be understood. Echoing Mearsheimer’s own arguments, Morgenthau would state that the Bush administration and neoconservatism unilaterally intervened into Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein and consequently demonstrate to other adversaries, like Iran and North Korea, that they might face similar faith. “The adversaries will quickly understand that the United States means business and that if they cross mighty Uncle Sam, they will pay a severe price” (Mearsheimer, 2005, p.2). Mearsheimer argues that Morgenthau would challenge this ‘bandwagoing logic’ and instead argue that it is more likely, and understandable, that states in the system will try to balance the power against a threatening state.

Further, and to explain this cleavage, Mearsheimer believes that Morgenthau would acknowledge that nationalism is a stronger force than democracy. He would predict that an externally enforced democracy would not be welcomed, since states strongly believe in self-determination. During the Vietnam War, Morgenthau argued that nationalism played a larger role than communism did in the opposition and insurgency to the United States’ presence.

Mearsheimer asserts that Morgenthau would have applied the same logic in his arguments against the Iraq War.

Mearsheimer also, though more implicitly and rather limited, discusses how Morgenthau would view the moral legitimacy of the Iraq War. Mearsheimer uses the colorful labels of ‘white hats’/‘good guys’ and ‘black hats’/‘bad guys’ to illustrate the good and evil forces, respectively. Further, he challenges the perception that United States always should be regarded as the ‘good guys’ and referred to United States earlier silent support to Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and the terrible sufferings of the Kurds. According to Mearsheimer “As Morgenthau clearly understood, it is often difficult to distinguish between good and bad guys in international politics [...] many people around the world are likely to view the Bush administration as a bully, not a liberator.” (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 5).

Summing up, Mearsheimer argues strongly that Morgenthau would have been equally vocal in his opposition to an Iraq invasion as he had criticized United States ‘crusade’ in the Vietnam War. Mearsheimer’s focus in his analysis is concentrated on a rather few themes that basically echoes Mearsheimer’s own school of thought – structural realism. My interpretation of Morgenthau’s Moral Realism will suggest that Morgenthau would have emphasized the moral arguments more explicitly.

4.4 Moral Realism and the Iraq War

In the sequel, I will analyze Morgenthau’s anticipated view regarding the Iraq War by interpreting his Moral Realism. The analysis is structured according to Six Principles.

1. Political realism is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. The first principle emphasizes that all political assessments and decisions are rooted in human nature that covers reason and rationality. However, assessments are often constrained by human capacity, time available, and influenced by non-rational phenomena. Morgenthau seems to favor the concept of *bounded rationality*, where a decision maker acknowledges these limitations and seeks a satisfactory solution rather than an optimal one (Simon, 2000).

Concerning the Iraq situation, I think Morgenthau would have challenged the factual basis for the decision of invading Iraq, as well as how the information was gathered and analyzed. He would have demanded a more open-minded and unbiased information gathering and analysis process. Further, he would have perhaps explored the subtle, but rare concession that Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld made during a news conference February 2002, when he explained

the lack of evidence to link the Iraqi government to weapons of mass destruction and potential supply to terrorist group:

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are *known knowns*; there are things we know we know. We also know there are *known unknowns*; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also *unknown unknowns*—the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones (Rumsfeld, 2002).

Given the large portion of unknowns, ample time available, and significant capacity and competence in the US bureaucracy and intelligence community, any premature and non-transparent decision of the Iraq situation would have been challenged by Morgenthau.

2. *The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.* This principle highlights the power struggle of a state and its relationship to the concept of interest. Morgenthau claims “that power functions as both a means and an end. It is an end because states wish to survive and are uncertain about other states’ intentions. It is a means to satisfy particular interests, which go beyond mere survival.” Further, he observes that “Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim.” (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 29).

For the Iraq situation, and from United States point of view, power is not an end. Given its already existing superior power, it is likely that Morgenthau would only have paid attention to United States national interest. He would have rhetorically asked how economic, diplomatic and soft power rather than military power, most intelligently and prudently could serve the long-term interests of United States. His answer would likely be that an Iraq War would not be in the interest of United States. He would probably have referred to the Vietnam War that proved to be so costly for United States in many ways and ultimately didn’t serve its national interests.

3. *Although the struggle for power and interests is objective and universal, it may evolve over time and place and depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated.* This principle acknowledges that struggle for power and its importance for preserving the national interests are timeless. However, circumstances of a situation at one point in history may put different emphasis on both power and interest to a state than in another point

in time with different sets of circumstances. “Yet the kind of interest [and power] determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated” (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 11).

Regarding the Iraq situation, the context and circumstances were uniquely influenced by the 9/11 attack and the apparent perceived threat of a new type of enemy – anti-Western religiously motivated terror groups. It was a more unpredictable and borderless enemy. Assuming security and prosperity remained the primary interests of the United States, it is likely that Morgenthau would have echoed the arguments of Mearsheimer favoring continued deterrence of these threats combined with diplomacy, rather than waging a preventive war with unknown effects in the Middle-East and for the US interests. Further, targeted and comprehensive cooperation with US allies to detect and remove credible terror plots would be recommended as a more prudent approach than the universal and unilateral war on terror declaration from the Bush administration.

4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action, but maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied. Morgenthau emphasizes that morality plays a significant part of any political decision. However, it should not be guided by Kantian principles, but rather from Aristotelean prudence to identify, decide and implement the lesser evil alternative.

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in the abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place [...] there can be no political morality without prudence, that is without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then considers prudence – the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions to be the supreme virtue in politics. (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 12)

For the Iraq situation, prudence means several things. First, it is very likely Morgenthau would have carefully investigated various options in order to make as informed decision as possible. The major claims of the Bush administration related to Iraq’s status on the acquiring nuclear capability and Iraq’s support or links to terrorist groups would have been challenged for convincing evidence. The questionable track record of the US intelligence community and the great influence of the military industrial complex would have been highlighted in order to establish a trustworthy, factual basis for the justification. Also, the consequences of a war as well as its potential duration, the human and economic costs, would likely have been scrutinized by Morgenthau.

Second, prudence means an open mind to gain and acknowledge new insight from the circumstances, and not to be a hostage of prejudices or foregone conclusions. When listening to the Bush' State of the Union in January 2002, one gets a strong impression that a war against Iraq is inevitable. A prudent leader would have stricken a more balanced tone, viewing the situation from different points of view, emphasizing the process (diplomacy) rather than a premature and biased conclusion. One can image that Morgenthau would have demanded Saddam Hussein to comply with all UN resolutions, but have given the inspectors from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ample time to finish their work, particularly if the progress and their working conditions were satisfactory.

5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. Here, Morgenthau condemns any nation that claims to possess a moral and universal answer “that to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations [...] [it is a] blasphemic conviction that God is always on one's side” (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p.12).

Further, he continues:

The lighthearted equation between particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible....it is also politically pernicious, for it is liable to engender the distortion of judgement that in the blindness of crusading frenzy, destroys nations and civilizations – in the name of moral principle, ideal or God himself. (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 12)

The Bush administration labelled Iraq as one of three members of the axis of evil. One could assume that Morgenthau would play such a label directly into his moral principle of lesser evil. He would probably ask what the lesser evil alternative was? Was it the evil Saddam Hussein and his unverified quest for gaining more regional power and possessing weapons of mass destruction, and his potential support of terror groups? Or was it a preventive war, with high human costs with many innocent civilian lives and refugees, questionable legitimacy, and with unpredictable long-term effects, economically and politically? In deliberation of such a question, it is likely that Morgenthau would have reminded the United States leaders and the public on the suffering and moral degradation that United States experienced during the Vietnam War. He would have warned that a parallel situation could likely evolve because of an invasion in Iraq.

Further, Morgenthau would have opposed the moral legitimacy of the argumentation of the Bush administration. He would have rejected the assertion that a specific state or political leader can claim to be the Chosen One or with Providence to decide, universally, what is good or evil states, acts or decisions. On the contrary, Morgenthau would have claimed that all alternatives that United States could choose among were fundamentally evil. It was the Bush administration's obligation to assess the consequences and its moral duty to choose the lesser evil alternative. Given the information that was provided regarding the seriousness and urgency of the threat that Iraq posed, Morgenthau would likely argue that an Iraq invasion could not be lesser evil one.

6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound. This principle returns to the core of power politics as Morgenthau defines it. He insists that political realism should maintain the autonomy of the political sphere, focusing on interest in terms of power, and by constantly asking "how does this policy affect the power of the nation?" (Morgenthau, 2006 [1948], p. 13). Further, he rejects any claims that political realism is amoral and unintelligent. On the contrary, he states that political realism is nuanced and based upon a pluralistic conception of human nature. Political decision makers need to be aware all factors, economically, legally, politically and morally, deal with them on their own terms, in order to make as wise and prudent decision as possible. Any overemphasis on one or a few of the aspects bears a risk of a decision with unwanted consequences.

So, this principle can be used sum up Morgenthau's main arguments. First it is very likely that Morgenthau would have joined most realist scholars in their opposition to the Iraq War and supported many of the frequent arguments against the invasion. Further, he would have agreed with Mearsheimer in his claims that the any aggression and prolonged war against Iraq would face strong opposition among the Iraqi people since it triggers nationalism when democracy is externally imposed. Winning 'hearts and mind' of the Iraqi people by force would face similar outlook as the case was in the Vietnam War.

Whereas Mearsheimer primarily focused on structural aspects like balance of power versus bandwagoning, Morgenthau would probably have emphasized the moral aspects. With basis in his Moral Realism, he would have claimed that all alternatives in the Iraq situation were evil. He would strongly oppose the Bush administration conviction of being a Chosen good force that had the moral obligation to remove an evil force like Iraq. Further, Morgenthau would have made a prudent assessment of the urgency and seriousness of the threat that Iraq posed to the United States' vital interest like security and prosperity. He would likely conclude that

deterrence combined with active diplomacy would be a lesser evil alternative than an invasion of Iraq. To support his arguments would probably have used relevant references to United States' disastrous strategy in the Vietnam War. As was the case with the Johnson administration ignorance of the realities in Vietnam War, Morgenthau would claim that the Bush administration focus on US hegemony, overconfidence in US' military power, ignorance of nationalistic forces in Iraq, would likely prove that an Iraq invasion was far from the lesser evil alternative.

5 Concluding remarks

The purpose of this thesis was to try to answer the following questions:

Could Morgenthau principles of classical realism and his moral philosophy join the realist opposition to the Iraq invasion? If so, what kind of arguments would he have used? How does these arguments compare to the arguments other realists used and how can Morgenthau's view complement or enforce these arguments?

In order to answer them, I have investigated the Bush administration's justification for the war, reviewed realists' opposition and their arguments against invading Iraq, as well as analyzed what I described as Morgenthau's *Moral Realism*.

It is likely that Morgenthau would have strongly opposed the invasion and that a significant part of his arguments would be of moral character. By focusing on prudence and choice of the lesser evil and referring to United States' costly lessons in the Vietnam War, he would have promoted a unique set of arguments than the arguments that were commonly used by other realists, including Mearsheimer.

Given the foresight that Morgenthau showed in his critics of the Vietnam War, his credibility should be at least matching the one of Kissinger, a reluctant, but nevertheless a high-profile supporter of the Iraq invasion. Thus, Morgenthau could have played an influential voice against the invasion that turned out to be such a failure for United States.

Morgenthau's Moral Realism is complex and nuanced. It is inspired from a range of classical philosophers. In this thesis I have focused on a version of Moral Realism where Aristotelian virtue ethics plays a dominant source of inspiration. A common and firm interpretation of his moral thinking has yet to be established and his work continues to spur both dispute and

appreciation. His work seems to attract and inspire a growing number of scholars in order to provide further insight into his complex form of realism.

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