The Impacts of Iraq's Invasion on the Politics in the Middle East

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Abstract: The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has substantial regional influences on the international relations of the Middle East. The war was supposed to bring democracy to Iraq and the whole region. After more than ten years, the dream of democracy evaporated not just for the region, but even for the Iraq. Instead the region has faced some negative consequences such as expansion of terrorism and increasing power competition between regional actors which has presented as a sectarian division between Sunni and Shia in the Middle East. Shifting power from major actors to the domestic and minor powers is considered as another impact of the war. The aim of this paper is to discuss these three impacts from perspective of the international relation theories. The prominence of this research is reflected in the investigating of IR theories in the real statute such as Iraq war.

1. Introduction

The invasion of Iraq is considered one of the major incidents after the Cold War which had great impacts on the Middle East. Even though, reasons for waging the war were unjustified, the outcomes were opposite of what the US planned to achieve in the context of the democratization of Iraq and the Middle East. According to International Relation (IR) theories and the IR scholars, there are various impacts of the Iraq war on the region. Both realism and liberalism as dominant theories in the IR have various interpretation for war, peace and power in the relation between states which is explained later. However, this paper discusses the three major impacts of the Iraq war on the politics of the Middle East. Firstly, the paper argues that the invasion of Iraq expanded terrorism in Iraq and the Middle East. Secondly, it explains the impact of the war on shifting balance of power in the region. Finally, the paper discusses the influence of the occupation on increasing tension between Shias and Sunnis in the region.

2. Expansion of Terrorism

2.1 Before the War

The Iraq War was not supported by most theorists in the international Relation. It is natural for liberalists

and constructivists to be opposed to the war because their theories essentially not support war. However, the Bush administration failed to gain support from realists, too. Mearsheimer and Walt (2003) as prominent leaders of realist theory were against the war in the beginning. According to realism theory, power and interests are the most important issues between states. If states comply with international law and international institution, it is because of their interests (Morrow, 2007, p. 560). Mearsheimer and Walt (2003) believe that the two wars which waged by Iraqi regime against Iran and Kuwait was not irrational. According to them, Iraqi's war against Iran can be considered as a response to Khomeini's revolution and Islamic fundamentalism because Saddam was a secular leader. In addition, Invasion of Kuwait was a response to difficult economic situation and debts. Thus, the realists argue that Iraq fought for own security against new revolution in Iran and invaded Kuwait for its own economic interest. More importantly, because Saddam was secular leader, he did not allow terrorist groups to have any activity inside Iraq. He also prevented Iran to have influence on radical groups in other countries in the Middle East (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003, pp. 53, 54). This may consider as a reasonable justification for not expanding terrorism in the Middle East before Saddam's era, but it is not a persuasive reason. Probably, invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the US and its' allies assist these terrorist groups to attract more people to fight against the US and the west.

2.2 IR Scholars' Opinion on This Impact

The invasion of Iraq has influenced the region significantly. Some scholars goes further by arguing that the Iraq war had impacts on the Arab Spring because the fall of Saddam challenged the stereotype that Arabic autocratic regimes cannot be removed (Fawcett, 2013, p.326). However, the first and the most significant impact of the Iraq war is that the terrorism has expanded in in the Middle East broadly. Many scholars and politicians warned the United States in this significant issue. Mearsheimer and Walt were among these scholars that warned the Bush administration of the invasion. They asserted that this war will be "heightened risk of terrorism, or increased hatred of the United states in the Arab and Islamic world" (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003, p. 59). Interestingly, this argument that the US invasion of Iraq will increase anti-American among Muslim and Arab world was emphasized by liberalists. Madeleine Albright (2006) believes that Iraqi occupation in 2003 has affected the US relation with Arab and Muslim societies. According to her, all republicans and democrats believed that the President Bush's response to 9/11 was not appropriate. The war on Afghanistan and Iraq affected the US foreign policy because it avoided the US to be a long-term ally to Muslim and Arab states and it had negative impact on the US reputation (Albright, 2006, p. 4). Others, Chomsky (2014) for instance, argues that the invasion of Iraq is the most significant factor for emerging ISIS (Islamic state of Iraq and Syria) in the Middle East. He goes further by describing the US as the largest terrorist state as he stated that the US is "the world's leading terrorist state" (Chomsky, 2014). Thus, the occupation of Iraq was rejected by majority of the IR scholars from different theories. The occupation is considered as a unilateral and individual decision form the Bush administration which has not achieved positive outcomes, but it assists spreading of terrorist activities in the region.

Mearsheimer and Walt's expectation about expanding terrorism after Iraq's occupation may account as a proper anticipation. After the invasion, the US troops launched many counter terrorism attacks and Iraqi forces also operated campaigns in Sunni areas after 2006. Sunni minority was the main target in most of these campaigns which operated by the Iraqi and the US forces between 2006 and 2011. This expanded

anger between Sunnis against Shia dominant government and the US troops. Al Qaida group exploited this anger among Sunnis and attracted many of them (Connable, 2014, p. 2). The organization operated many terrorist attacks on Iraqi cities between 2006 and 2007 after the US air strikes killed Al Qaida's leader Zarqawi. In October 2006, Abu Ayyub al-Masri rose as a new leader of the group and established Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). This terrorist group was successful to increase tension between Sunni and Shia by targeting members of Shia group. Thus, the level of violence increased in 2011 and after the withdrawal of American troops in the country. According to statistics about 8000 Iraqi civilians were killed as a result of increasing violence in the country only in 2013 (Laub & Masters, 2014). However, the uprising in Syria as part of the Arab spring motivated the ISI to be more ambitious and change their name to (ISIS) Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The ISIS could to occupy a significant part of Iraq and Syria (Laub & Masters, 2014, p. 1, 2). Thus, this significant threat to the region and the whole world should be responded more effectively by the US because a few airstrikes are not sufficient to eradicate the ISIS's influence in the Middle East.

Ironically, the emerging of ISIS may not account as a significant threat from the point view of some American scholars. There is also a claim which ignores the unprecedented growing of the ISIS and terrorist groups in the Middle East. For Fukuyama (as cited in Mcbain, 2014), the ISIS cannot be considered as significant threat for the US and western democracy. He criticizes Obama's policy in the region because he has so much attention on the ISIS. According to Fukuyama, there is exaggeration of the terrorist threat as he states "The whole west, and especially the United States, has overestimated the impact of terrorism" (Mcbain, 2014). According to him, instead of greater concentration on the ISIS, Obama should respond to the real threats of the west which are China and Russia as important economic power in the world. China is rising as a significant global economic power and Russia by expanding its border are real threat for Western liberal democracy (Mcbain, 2014). For Fukuyama (2007), it is not in the best interest of the western counties to fix Middle Eastern issues with terrorist groups, but it is better for them to find solution for these terrorists who attacked Madrid, London and Amsterdam. He believes these terrorists grow up inside western democracy and they were not lack of democracy. Thus, western countries should concentrate more on their internal issue with terrorism (Fukuyama, 2007, p. 74). This ignorance of terrorism in the Middle East by Fukuyama as one of the most influential scholar on the US foreign policy is not in the best interest of the US and the region.

Fukuyama's claim can be understood that he read the situation just inside the United States territory and in a very narrow framework, but ISIS is the most significant threat for the region after Iraq war in 2003. Fukuyama may forget the ISIS contains from Al Qaida members', the terrorist group who attacked US in 9/11 (Friedman, 2014). In addition, the ISIS has occupied massive land of Iraq and Syria and has redrawn the official borders. ISIS is acting like and independent state and has sophisticated financial fund specially from selling oil (Connable, 2014). Thus, the ISIS is a significant threat to the region and it will leave great impact on the politics of the region for long a term.

3. Shifting of Power Influence from Global Actors to Regional and Domestic Actors

Another major impact of the invasion of Iraq is shifting of direct influence of global actors to regional and domestic actors. In 1991, the US led coalition to move out Iraq from Kuwait after Iraqi regime invaded the country. The Gulf War was supported by the United Nations and the UN Security Council (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003, p. 54). The Iraq war in 2003 is a different case. The United States did not

have legacy to attack the country. The US failed to gain support from its allies in Europe except the UK, Spain and Poland. Some countries such as Germany and France strongly opposed the military solution in 2003 (Schuster & Maier, 2006, P. 223). In addition, the US failed in regarding with achievement objectives of the Iraq war. Bush administration could not find any types of weapons of mass destruction which was one of the major justifications for waging the war against Iraq. The US also failed to establish a new prodemocracy and pro-American government. Instead the war led to decrease the US power in the region. The war assisted Iran to expand its' power in the region and Iraqi government. Thus, Walt simply explains that "the US lost" (Walt, 2012).

3.1 The Regional Actors

The war had great impact to change the multilateral regional power to ascendancy of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region. Before the Iraq war, regional supremacy was divided between numbers of countries according to different period of time. For instance, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq were sharing regional power over the region during the Cold war. Each of these states were supported by the US or the former USSR politically and military. It was in interest of both the US and the USRR to not allow regional supremacy for any of these countries by conserving regionalization balance of power (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 18). Essentially, the purpose of theory of balance of power is to prevent war and make peace among countries. The Middle East is one of the regions which can be subject to the principle balance of power especially among oil producing countries because regional supremacy by one county makes risk on the stability and security of the region. Moreover, the shift in balance of power has decreased the US hegemony in the region and there are number reasons behind that (Paul et al., 2004).

According to Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann, there are several reasons that challenge the US as a hegemonic power in the Middle East. Firstly, it is not easy for the US to prevent sectarian and ethnic violence in the region. On the one hand, the US wants to make a peace process between Israelis and Palestinians which needs better policy to stabilize the two sides of the conflict. Another hand, it is really hard to keep Iraq united which is a divided society essentially and it is harder to democratize such a county like Iraq. It means there are some internal factors that driven the violence in the region and it is difficult for external power such as the US to control them. Secondly, there are some regional and global powers that have taken opposite direction against the US hegemony. Regional forces such as Iran, Islamic organization and terrorism groups in Iraq and Syria are rejecting the US hegemony. They are also not accepting the US influence in the region. In addition, some global actors including European counties France for instance require greater involvement in the region. Finally, the opposition against the US military existence has increased in the Arab word especially after the unjustified occupation of Iraq. The "double standard" of the US foreign policy against Arab word and taken clear opposition in the Israel-Palestine issue have increased anti-American movement in the region (Paul et al., 2004).

3.2 The Domestic Actors

Some domestic actors have risen strongly in the region Such as the Kurds in Iraq after 2003. Iraq is one of the diverse countries in the Middle East which ruled by Sunni minority from establishment of the country until 2003. Iraq was instable country during the last century not just because external factors, but internal factors also had a significant role in the politics of the country. According Halliday (2005), Sunnis which contain quarter of Iraqi population developed Arab nationalism upon Kurds and Shies.

Because they consider themselves as different identity from Sunnis, the conflicts between them increased after 2003. From this point, it will be clear the importance of identity in the IR theories. This significant issue ignored by both realism and liberalism. Realism argues that the international system is all about anarchy, self-help and power. Thus, there is no cooperation between states because all states work for their interests (Lawson, 2003). Liberalists not deny anarchism, but they believe this anarchic system can be managed by cooperation between states. In addition international institutions can play a great role in this area (Baylis et al., 2013).

However, both realists and liberalists ignore important of identities and norms which are socially constructed. As Wendt explains that there are different identities but "each identity is an inherently social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves" (Wendt, 1992). According to him, all identities and interests are organized in a framework of norms and rules, he believes "these have motivational force only in virtue of actors' socialization to and participation in collective knowledge" (Wendt, 1992, p. 399). Thus, there are some internal factors which have great impact on state behavior. For instance, Iraqi government was governed by Sunni Arab minorities before 2003. Therefore, Iraq attempted to protect interests of this identity. Iraq has changed after 2003 because Shia and Kurdish identities have emerged and there is a reflection of these identities in state behavior. The new Iraqi government is more pro-Iranian because the government is dominated by Shia group. This group considers itself closer to Iran rather than Arab states.

3.3 The KRG as a Domestic Actor

Another different identity is the Kurds which have played a great role in the Middle East since 2003. Removing Saddam by the US was historical point for emerging other identities inside Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has emerged as an active actor and de facto state in Iraq and in the Middle East after 2003 (Černy, 2014). The success of the region can be described through Zakaria's words as he stated that the KRG "is the one unambiguous success story of the Iraq war" (Zakaria, 2006). However, Zakaria claims Iraqi Kurdistan "is a Muslim region in the Arab world that wants to be part of the modern world, not blow it up"(Zakaria, 2006). This is not the best description of the Kurdistan Region. The 'modern world' that claims by Zakaria is continuing of 'clash of ignorance' which Said mentions it in his article because western scholars just account west as a modern world (Said, 2001). Zakaria's claim can be read through postcolonialism and orientalism theory because according to him Muslim and the Arab world still want to blow up the 'modern western world'. As Said mentioned that these kind of claims "still continues between area scholars, such as Orientalists, and government departments of foreign affairs" (Said, 1979, p. 345).

However, the KRG is officially and legally recognized by new Iraqi constitution in 2005. The new constitution grants regions and provinces a great power especially for the KRG and other oil producing provinces including production, management and development oil fields (Brown & Brown, 2005). These privileges deprive Sunni provinces from benefits of natural resources which do not have significant oil fields in their provinces. Probably, these provinces of Iraqi constitution led Kanan Makiya to prescribe the constitution as "punitive document" for Sunni minority (Makiya, 2005). This development in Iraq after invasion assists Kurds to build strategic partnership with neighboring countries in particular with Turkey. The energy partnership with Turkey recently advanced recently and the KRG has established

new independent pipeline through Turkey to sell oil to the rest of the world without federal government's permission (Morelli & Pischedda, 2014).

4. Increasing Tensions between Sunni and Shia in the Region

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 has significantly increased tension between Sunni and Shia. There is a serious claim that the main factor of this sectarian division is religion. Many scholars and politician developed this claim including the US president Barack Obama. Obama simply describes the conflicts in the Middle East as "in that part of the world, there are ancient sectarian differences"(Byman, 2014). It is true there is sectarian division in the Middle East, but religion may not be the only reason or even major reason. There is a power competition among major actors in the region which exploit weaknesses of some weak state in the region. For instance, Maliki's inappropriate policies have affected negatively on Sunni minority in Iraq. His policies were supported by both the US and Iran. One of the erroneous policies against Sunnis was de-Baathification which prevented all members of former bath party form all government positions. Another issue was disbanding all members of the former Iraqi army and security forces. All these mistakes caused a great number of unemployment among Sunnis. As a result, this led thousands of Iraqi Sunnis to be an enemy for the government and increased further tension between Sunni and Shia inside the country (Laub & Masters, 2014, p. 2).

4.1 Power Competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia

It can be argued that the issue is more about power competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran did not have this significant influence before the invasion of Iraq. Iraq was main obstacle for expanding Islamic radicalism from Iran to the rest of the region after Iranian revolution in 1979. Iraq as a strong neighboring county of Iran limited Iranian revolution's ambitious and Iraq did not allow the revolution to be expanded in the region. In addition, Iran was described as 'axis of evil' just like North Korea and Iraq by President Bush after September 11. Even, there was a possibility of western intervention in Iran after 9/11 attack (Fawcett, 2013, p. 332). Iraq war has changed Iran's power in the region. Iraqi government is a significant ally to Iran. Iran is a major support of Assad's regime in Syrian. In addition Iran has a great influence in Lebanon, Palestine and Bahrain (Fawcett, 2013, p. 326). Thus, According to Walt, Iran was the first winner of the Iraq war in the Middle East (Walt, 2012).

The growth of Iranian influence on the region was always a major concern of Saudi Arabia especially after Iranian revolution in 1979. This real concern led Saudi Arabia to formally warn the US to not invade Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the US ignored Saudi's King and his foreign minister's advice and invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. According to a US document which published by WikiLeaks, this was one of the main issues between the US and Saudi Arabia (Keller & Star, 2011, P. 197). According realism theory, anarchy in the international system lead states to maximize their security. According major realists such as Waltz and Art the "escalation of violence is basic human nature." If one state initiates violence, other state responds in violence, too (Art & Waltz, 2009, p. 338). Thus, each state attempt to protect national interest therefore war and violence are inevitable. From here, the importance of balance of power will emerge in the international atmosphere (Duncan, Jancar-Webster, & Switky, 2008, p. 42). Thus, increasing power of Iran motivates Saudi Arabia to expand power on the region especially after withdrawn the US troops in Iraq which was significant mistake form Saudi's perspective. For Saudi Arabia, Iran is the first and most dangerous threat in the region because Iran not just has

influence on Iraq, but it has great impact on Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain and Palestine. Therefore, for Saudi Arabia, it crucial to reduce Iran's threat in the region (Shichor, 2014, p. 105).

5. Concluding Remarks

The occupation of Iraq has influenced politics of the Middle East significantly. The war has assisted terrorist groups to have greater role and occupy massive land in the region. The ISIS as a sophisticated terrorist group has redrawn the Iraqi and Syrian border. In addition, the invasion of Iraq was a historical point for some actors to increase their power in the region such as Iran and the Kurds. While, the war influenced negatively on the coexistence among various sectarian groups in the region. As a result, the region is less stable than before and power competition between major actors has increased. Thus, the politics of the region is more about struggling for power and less cooperative, opposite to the rest of regions in the world. This instability in the Middle East will not circulate only in the region, but it will affect other countries worldwide. After almost twelve years of the invasion, neither Iraqi people nor the US achieved the objectives for waging Iraq war. The US could not find any types of weapon of mass distraction and failed to bring democracy to the Middle East and Iraq.

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