

Imagine that you were in charge of the US government and believed that the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan could have been avoided? Give empirical evidence to support your arguments.

# QUESTION = 6

## Introduction:

The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) can be classified as wars of choice rather than wars of necessity. A close examination of intelligence assessments, diplomatic options and post-war outcomes demonstrates that both conflicts could have been avoided through alternative policy instruments grounded in containment, multilateralism and targeted counterterrorism.

The invasion of Iraq was primarily justified by claims regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). However, the Iraq Survey Group's Duelfer Report (2004) conclusively established that Iraq had dismantled its WMD programs by 1991. Simultaneously, UNMOVIC and IAEA inspection were actively underway, conducting over 700 inspections by early 2003.

Hans Blix reported no evidence of an active nuclear weapon program, indicating that institutional verification mechanisms were functioning actively. Moreover, throughout the 1990s, Iraq was already constrained by sanctions, no-fly zones and deterrence. CIA assessment revealed that Iraq's military capability had declined by more than 90 percent, undermining claims of an imminent threat.

Equally significant was the absence of international legal legitimacy. The Iraq invasion lacked explicit UN Security Council authorization, contravening Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. Key allies such as France and Germany advocated continued inspections, demonstrating that diplomacy remained a viable alternative.

Additionally, the 9/11 Commission Report (2004) found no operational link between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda, invalidating

terrorism based justification for regime change.

In Afghanistan, the initial counter-terrorism objective following 9/11 could have been pursued without prolonged occupation. Taliban representatives signaled willingness in October 2001 to hand over Osama bin Laden to a third country if evidence was provided, as reported by the BBC.

Furthermore, regional actors including Pakistan, Iran and Russia offered intelligence cooperation against Al-Qaeda, making a multilateral counter-terrorism strategy feasible.

Empirical outcomes further support the avoidability thesis. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Iraq became the world's most terror-affected country by 2014, accounting for over 30 percent of global terrorism deaths, illustrating the phenomenon of strategic blowback. The Costs of War Project (Brown University)

estimates over 900,000 deaths, 38 million displaced persons, and a financial burden exceeding \$ 8 trillion, significantly weakening U.S. long-term strategic capacity. Diplomatic precedents, such as Libya's voluntary dismantling of WMD program in 2003 through negotiation, further prove that war was not the only available policy option.

## Conclusion:

Empirical evidence indicates that the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were avoidable policy failures driven by flawed intelligence, sidelined diplomacy and ideological interventionism rather than genuine security needs. As Kenneth Waltz observed, "war is often the result of political miscalculation rather than strategic necessity." A restrained strategy based on containment, multilateralism and targeted counter-terrorism would have better served U.S. interests and global stability.