

IR Theory in Practice Case Study: The Gulf War, 1990-1991

Section 1

Realist IR Theory and the Gulf War

From reading Chapter 6 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Realist International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already, as its contents will not be repeated here.

Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).

Introduction

There are many ways in which Operation Desert Storm, the military action to repel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, fits into traditional Realist accounts of war. In addition to reading this section, however, you should consult the Liberalism, Marxism, Constructivist, and Poststructuralist Theory sections of the case study for important alternatives to Realism. The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapter 6 of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e)* illustrate important aspects of the first Gulf War from a Realist perspective.

We will briefly focus on **1) US geo-strategic dominance in the post-Cold War era; 2) the protection of Western oil interests; and 3) the enduring reality of military power.** By no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways Realist IR theory might help you think about the 1990-91 Gulf War and its aftermath.

1) US Dominance and Balance of Power

Though the Soviet Union had not yet collapsed by the time Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the Cold War was already viewed as over (see ch.3-4). Though debates over who won or lost the Cold War would inevitably ensue, it was clear to many that the United States had emerged from the confrontation as the so-called "leader of the free world" and sole remaining superpower.

Iraq invaded Kuwait after a long argument over the price of oil and outstanding war debts. In realist terms, US interest lay in preventing any one power from dominating the Gulf region, and Iraq's expansionist actions threatened to upset the regional balance of power. (In the past, the US had allied itself with Iraq against Iran in order to maintain that balance, a history that, among other factors, may have convinced Baghdad that the George H.W. Bush administration would not militarily oppose its actions.) Realist theory also holds that sovereignty is one of the basic principles of international order, and Iraq's disregard for Kuwait's sovereignty posed a challenge to one of the ordering principles of the international system.

The United States, however, delivered an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein (via UN Resolutions 660 and 678) to withdraw before 15 January 1991. When Iraq's forces did not comply, a land offensive (Operation Desert Storm) was initiated on 24 February 1991. Led by the United States, it was backed twenty-eight other states marshalled under a UN mandate. Within three days, what was reputed at the time to be the fourth-largest standing army in the world had been pushed back behind the Iraq-Kuwait border, and Saddam Hussein unconditionally accepted the UN Resolutions. What Saddam had billed as the "Mother of All Battles" ended in his utter military defeat (though he was not yet to be removed from power by the United States) and the restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

Writing at the time, Michael Kinsley suggested that, "to justify American actions in the Persian Gulf, President Bush cannot call upon the usual rhetoric about democracy and freedom. Instead, the reigning concept is 'order'." (Kinsley, 1991: 221). The United States demonstrated that it would not tolerate open defiance of its demands, threats to its interests in political stability and the continuous supply of oil from the Gulf (see section 2), or broader attempts to overturn the US-led 'international order.' As the dominant power in the international system, the US would act to protect the stability of the system, and thereby ensure perpetuation of its own pre-eminence. The Gulf War demonstrated both America's dominance of the international system and its resulting relative freedom in enforcing its interests, consistent with the tenets of Realist IR theory.

2) Western Oil Interests

Realists can straightforwardly account for the decision of the US-led coalition to repel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in terms of the price of oil and who controls it. Iraq, had it successfully annexed Kuwait, would not only have reclaimed territory but would have controlled 20% of the world's reserves of oil, the most significant commodity in the industrialized world, and would probably have dominated the decision-making of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Analysts feared that Iraq could have bullied Saudi Arabia into a damaging oil price hike and caused catastrophic economic recessions in the industrialized North. According to *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, "both the right-makes-right arguments and those of national sovereignty are really, at best, more palatable ways of saying that the United States interests in the Persian Gulf is primarily economic" (Friedman 1991: 206).

Box 1.1: Thomas L. Friedman

The United States has not sent troops to the Saudi desert to preserve democratic principles. The Saudi monarchy is a feudal regime that does not even allow women to drive cars. Surely it is not American policy to make the world safe for feudalism. This is about money, about protecting governments loyal to America and punishing those that are not and about who will set the price of oil... [T]he interest at stake may be, in short, to make the world safe for gas guzzlers

Thomas L. Friedman, 'Washington's "Vital Interests"', p.203, 206.

Realists believe that powerful states are able to shape the international political economy in ways favourable to them (Krasner, 1976, 1978). Iraq, therefore, represented the exercise of state power by the most powerful state and its allies to protect their economic interests. However, since Realists have traditionally focused on military power as the defining attribute of state power and interest, focusing on the economic interests behind US intervention does diminish *Realpolitik* to a limited extent. (For example, is it problematic for Realist theory that, although the US provided the military muscle, it was Japan who bankrolled the UN-coalition?) This brings us to our next point about Realist theory and the Gulf War.

3) Military Power Still Dominates

In much of Realist literature on international relations, military force remains the most important measure of assessing state strength. Although great powers must excel across a range of capabilities, the Realist tradition places military force at the top of the hierarchy. Clearly the swiftness of the US-led coalition's defeat of Iraq points to the continuing relevance of this insight. Some in the American foreign policy establishment believed that the United States had developed a harmful aversion to the use of force after its involvement in Vietnam (the so-called "Vietnam syndrome"), and that the Gulf War would shift the country toward a more forceful defence of its international interests. These included the military limitation of Iraq's capacity to threaten its neighbours and international order (as discussed in Section 1).

Box 1.2

The Persian Gulf War - would anyone now call it the war to liberate Kuwait? - was not a war to end war. It was a war to end a syndrome, to renew us for more war. Inclined by habit toward war, we had been stopped, stunned by the trauma of seeing ourselves as we prosecuted low-intensity war against Vietnam.

Thomas Dumm, United States, p.178.

Box 1.3: Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction in 1991

As I report to you, air attacks are under way against military targets in Iraq. We are determined to knock out Saddam Hussein's nuclear bomb potential. We will also destroy his chemical weapons facilities. Much of Saddam's artillery and tanks will be destroyed. Our operations are designed to best protect the lives of all the coalition forces by targeting Saddam's vast military arsenal.

George Bush, 'The Liberation of Kuwait Has Begun', Speech of January 16, 1991, p.312

The Gulf War, however, also showed some of the limitations of traditional Realist frameworks for assessing military force. Consider deterrence and compellence theory. Deterrence is the threat of the use of force to prevent someone doing something they would otherwise do. Compellence is the threat of the use of force to make someone do

something they would otherwise *not* do. Despite its overwhelming military power, the United States was unable either to deter Iraq from invading Kuwait, nor compel it to withdraw without initiating military action (Herring 1995). Conversely, Iraq could not deter an attack by US and allied forces despite its status as the fourth-largest military in the world and possession of chemical weapons.

At the end of the Cold War, scholars have debated whether the influence of military power in international relations is waning, as economically significant powers such as Germany and Japan exercise considerable political influence despite their relative military weakness. By now you should be familiar with the factors many claimed led to a decline in the effectiveness of military power in the era of 'globalization': greater interdependence (which reduces the incentives to use force), increasing estimates of the cost of war (both financially and in terms of destructiveness), an acute sensitivity to casualties, the restraining qualities of nuclear weapons, and the spread of liberal democracy. Realism's critics highlight these factors; traditional state-centric and overly militarized world-views are inadequate. Although the Gulf War appeared to uphold the Realist belief in the importance of military power, at least temporarily, it also revealed some of its weaknesses.

Section 2

Liberal IR Theory and the Gulf War

From reading Chapter 7 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Liberal International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.

Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).

Introduction

The previous section of this case study examined the Realist claims through which the 1990-91 Gulf War can be viewed. There are many ways, however, in which Operation Desert Storm and its aftermath provide support for Liberal IR theory. In addition to this section, you should consult the Marxism, Constructivist, and Poststructuralist theory sections of the case study for important alternatives to Liberalism and Realism. The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapter 7 of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e.)* illustrate important aspects of the Gulf War from a Liberal perspective.

Like realism, there is no definitive liberal IR theory. As suggested in the previous case study, Liberalism derives from a set of broad assumptions that diverge from Realism concerning the greater number of relevant actors in world politics, the impact of institutions and domestic society, and liberal ideas concerning the power of human rights.

In the context of the crisis in the Gulf, we will briefly focus on **1) the concept of a 'New World Order' after the Cold War; 2) the importance of multilateralism when undertaking military action; and 3) the creation of a safe 'humanitarian' area for the Kurds**. As with the previous section, by no means can the following be an exhaustive survey of the possible ways Liberal international theory might help you think about the 1990-91 Gulf War and its aftermath.

1) The New World Order

The words of US President George H.W. Bush on 16 January 1991, two hours after the "liberation of Kuwait" had commenced, were the language of liberalism – emphasizing a new world characterized by the principles of international law, the UN, and peacekeeping.

Box 2.1: The New World Order

"This is an historic moment... We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations. When we are successful, and we will be, we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfil the promise and vision of the UN's founders".

US President George H.W. Bush, 16 January 1991

One of the greatest alleged triumphs of the first President Bush's actions in the Gulf was his ability to mobilize such a broad-ranging coalition of states through the United Nations to support Operation Desert Storm. And seemingly crucial to this support was his invocation of basic principles of international law. With the defence of democracy a relatively less important rationale - most in the West viewed Kuwait as a feudal democracy - an alternative legitimating principle came into play.

2) Multilateral Action and Liberal States

Although Realists claim that military force is the ultimate form of power, Liberals find this claim problematic. They argue instead that the exertion of force is always influenced by other political factors, and moreover, must always be employed in tandem with other forms such as diplomacy, intelligence, economic influence, and media influence. For Liberals, pure force is a less efficient means of achieving one's will than persuasion and politics, which depend in turn on legitimacy and consent. In the international arena, these factors are created largely by multilateralism.

As discussed above, one of the seeming great triumphs of the first Bush presidency in relation to Iraq was the mobilization of a broad-ranging coalition of states to support Desert Storm. Though the first Gulf War was led by the US, it was backed by twenty-eight other states under a UN mandate. Importantly, this incorporated support from both Western liberal democracies and prominent Muslim states, including Saudi Arabia. Liberals point to American concern with securing UN authorization and creation of an international coalition as evidence of the importance of multilateralism and institutions.

Liberals generally believe that increased levels of interdependence and co-action through multilateral institutions also moderate the raw application of force by increasing the importance of economics as a policy instrument in international affairs (see ch.14 and 16). They point to Japan's role, which involved no warfighting but which, as the second-largest economy with an industrial interest in ensuring access to oil reserves, largely funded the Gulf War.

Finally, parts of the Liberal tradition emphasize the effect domestic societal factors play in mitigating the Realist ability to define Great Powers solely through military force assessment. States, particularly liberal democratic states, are reluctant to employ force if it involves the loss of life (the so-called "Vietnam syndrome"). The US, it is argued, is particularly reluctant to deploy troops into violent conflicts.

Box 2.2: The Highway of Death

Footage of charred Iraqi corpses caught in the procession of vehicles on the main route out of Kuwait by Allied bombardment - the so-called "Highway of Death" - also surfaced after the cease-fire. Did President Bush call a premature halt to the ground war because he pessimistically anticipated the impact of such grotesque images on American public opinion...?

Susan Carruthers, The Media at War, pp.141-2.

That the awareness of the political repercussions of casualties in the Gulf War was influential in the early withdrawal of US troops is indicative of this. Liberal publics, it has been argued, are unwilling to sacrifice the lives of their own soldiers unless the national interest is directly at stake (Jentleson). Noting the sensitivity of liberal democratic states to casualties therefore influences our understanding of Western conduct of the war itself.

3) Safe Areas for the Kurds

Prior to, during, and since the 1990-91 Gulf War, the Kurds and Shiites of Iraq have suffered enormous repression from the (predominantly Sunni) Iraqi regime. In fact, the Kurds in Northern Iraq and Turkey have been seeking independent state-hood since around 1880 and have sustained human rights abuses from both Iraq and NATO ally Turkey. Since 1988, however, the regime in Baghdad intermittently used chemical weapons and has arguably also committed genocide against the Kurds (Stromseth, 1993: 81; Wheeler, 2000: 140).

Box 2.3: Western Culpability?

"Iraq's genocidal violence against its Kurdish population in the 1980s went essentially unsanctioned. French President François Mitterrand and the Reagan administration denounced Iraq's use of chemical weapons, but the international community failed to impose sanctions on Iraq for its attacks against the Kurds as political and strategic considerations once again overrode humanitarian concerns".

Jane Stromseth, 'Iraq', p.81.

Immediately after Operation Desert Storm, UN Resolution 688 established "no fly zones" for Iraqi forces along with "safe havens" to protect the Kurds. Western military forces, primarily from the US and UK, patrolled inside Iraqi territory from then on, and periodically bombed Iraqi forces when they were alleged to threaten these air patrols.

Box 2.4: Safe Havens as Emergent Humanitarian Norms

The plight of the Kurds constituted a supreme humanitarian emergency and without outside military intervention hundreds of thousands would have died from hypothermia and exhaustion... The decision by [British Prime Minister] Major and [US President] Bush to launch the safe havens reflected a mix of humanitarian and non-humanitarian motives, but what matters is that, even if it is argued that Major and Bush acted only to appease domestic public pressures for intervention, this non-humanitarian motive did not conflict with the declared humanitarian purpose of the operation.

Nicholas Wheeler, 'A Solidarist Moment in International Society?', p.170.

Viewed through a liberal lens, the establishment of these safe havens may constitute a case of humanitarian intervention (see ch.32).

Discussion question

Would you agree that the establishment of safe havens is an example of a human rights policy embedded within an otherwise *Realpolitik* conflict?

Section 3

Marxist Theory and the Gulf War

From reading Chapter 8 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Marxist International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this crucial chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.

Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).

Introduction

As with the Kosovo case study, it will not take you long to realize that Marxists are the most critical of Operation "Desert Storm". The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights you will have learnt from Chapter 8 of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e.)* illustrate important aspects of the first Gulf War from a Marxist perspective. As with other cases and sections, you should consult the Realism, Liberalism, Constructivist, and Poststructuralist theory sections for important alternatives to Marxism. While some of the authors mentioned in this part of the case study may not explicitly identify themselves as Marxist, they are radical in comparison to Liberalism and Realism and are all united in their critique of the West. In the context of the crisis in the Gulf we will focus on 1) the "reality" of Bush's "New World Order"; 2) the designation of Iraq as a "rogue state"; and 3) the imposition of economic sanctions after the war. Again, the following can by no means be an exhaustive survey of the ways Marxist and radical international theory might help you think about the 1990-91 Gulf War and its aftermath.

1) "World Orders, Old and New"

Far from heralding a *New World Order* guided by the rule of law, radical scholar Noam Chomsky has suggested that American (and British) bullying tactics in the 1990-91 Gulf conflict demonstrates the conduct of "business as usual" for powerful Western elites. The reality of 'world order,' he suggests, is as it always has been – lawlessness for the West and its allies, and the rule of (largely Western-imposed) law for the rest. For Marxists and radicals, the Realist-Liberal picture of Iraqi belligerence and violation of international law is undermined by the unwillingness of the US and UK to seriously attempt to use diplomacy to avoid war, their restriction of all other options except military intervention, and their continued subversion of the economic sanctions originally designed to remove Iraq's forces from Kuwait.

Box 3.1: I Thought We Were Friends...

Saddam Hussein is a murderous gangster, just as he was before August 2, when he was an amiable friend and favoured trading partner. His invasion of Kuwait is another crime, comparable to others, not as terrible as some; for example, the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, which reached near genocidal levels thanks to diplomatic and material support from the US and Britain, the two righteous avengers of the Gulf.

Noam Chomsky, 'The Use (and Abuse) of the United Nations', p.309

That Washington has little use for diplomatic means or institutions of world order, unless they can be used as instruments of its own power, has been dramatically illustrated in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central America, and elsewhere. Nothing is likely to change in this regard, including the efficiency with which the facts are concealed.

Noam Chomsky, Year 501: The Conquest Continues, p.91

From this critical perspective, Western belligerence, especially on the part of the US and UK, shares blame for the war. According to Chomsky, "the response to Saddam Hussein's aggression is unprecedented because he stepped on the wrong toes. The US is upholding no high principle in the Gulf; nor is any other state" (1991: 309). Marxist and radical scholars cite US and UK willingness to bypass the UN, as in issues relating to Israel and Palestine and the NATO bombing example of Yugoslavia in 1999, as further evidence of this.

2) Iraq's "Rogue" Status

Since the first Gulf War, Iraq has perhaps been the foremost "rogue element" or "state of concern" for the so-called "international community". Along with pariahs such as Libya, Cuba, Iran and North Korea, Iraq has faced economic sanctions, military air strikes and the verbal wrath of the United States and its allies. The crimes allegedly committed by these "rogues" include state-sponsored terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, internal repression, and the violation of international norms of peaceful coexistence.

Radical approaches to international theory, however, turn this idea on its head. Though they condemn the illegitimate behaviour of authoritarian regimes, writers such as Eric Herring and Noam Chomsky argue that they expose the ways in which powerful states in the West are threats to international peace and security, rather than solely providers of security (as they are portrayed in their own discourse and in much of mainstream academic International Relations).

Box 3.2: Destructive Rogue Rage

Rogue rage has brought about massive destruction by the United States and its allies in the name of preventing mass destruction by others, and the focus on preventing the use of WMD by supposed rogue states has distracted attention from the actual mass destruction taking place in the world... [W]e should listen to... the sceptical voices... who... caution us about the potential for promotion of norms to turn into the infliction of mass destruction on the demonised rogue other in new, more respectable clothes.

Eric Herring, 'Rogue Rage', pp. 207-8.

One way of highlighting this is to show how, in the words of Murray Waas, "Saddam's military machine is partly the creation of Western powers. Margaret Thatcher, perhaps the most bellicose Western leader, allowed British arms concerns to sell billions of dollars worth of tanks, missile parts, and artillery to Iraq" (Waas, 1991:87). Waas argues that the US shares this culpability.

Box 3.3: Fighting against Weapons You Have Supplied?

The Reagan administration, in apparent violation of international federal law, engaged in a massive effort to supply arms and military supplies to the regime of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. Some of these efforts to supply arms to Iraq appear not only to have violated federal law, but, in addition, a US arms embargo then in effect against Iraq.

Murray Waas, 'What Washington Gave Saddam for Christmas', p.85

Another approach to portraying the threat posed by Western powers highlights problems *within* Western liberal states related to economic, racial and sexual inequality.

Box: 3.4: Whose Priorities in the New World Order?

The lives of Americans in need are not high on the list of priorities in Bush's New World Order. We can spend hundreds of millions - soon to be a billion - a day to liberate oil-soaked Kuwait, but we can't provide health care to the millions at home who lack insurance. We can shelter soldiers in a hostile environment, but we can't house the homeless in our own streets.

Robert Massa, 'The Forgotten War', p.323

3) Smart Weapons; Stupid Sanctions

From a critical perspective, perhaps one of the greatest "crimes against humanity" in the Middle East was committed by leaders in the West during the 1990s, who maintained a policy of economic sanctions against Iraq until the invasion and occupation in 2003. Originally designed as an incentive for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, they were

subsequently justified as a way of preventing Saddam Hussein from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (see Ch.24). Radicals ask why the US local, regional, and global superiority in conventional force as well as its nuclear arsenal was not considered sufficient to deter the regime from using such weapons.

Some have argued that these sanctions barely touched the regime, but crippled the innocent people of Iraq. Since the early 1990s, humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF, the Red Cross, and Amnesty International issued reports of suffering; basic medicines, a clean water supply, and satisfactory levels of food were lacking, with especially detrimental effects on the poor, the elderly, the sick and children. UNICEF reported that thousands of children died as a result of sanctions. Marxist and other radical scholars ask, therefore, whether the benefits of the sanctions outweighed the suffering that they imposed, and whether the West was, in effect, creating the conditions that they claimed to oppose - an angry, desperate Iraq. Until the second Bush administration came to power, Western leaders, including the United States, appeared to prefer a weak dictator than the unknown quantity of future change. Meanwhile, from a Marxist and radical perspective, for the leaders of the West, as with all capitalist states, the suffering of normal Iraqis was simply not high up the agenda.

Section 4

Constructivist and Poststructuralist Approaches to IR Theory and the Iraq War

From reading Chapters 10 and 11 of The Globalization of World Politics (6e), you should now be familiar with Post-colonialism and Poststructuralism (which you may hear called 'alternative theories' of International Relations). This section also includes some material on the Gulf War under the social constructivist framework (see Ch. 9), a branch of IR theory nascent at the time of the Gulf War. You are advised to consult these crucial chapters if you have not done so already as their contents will not be repeated here.

Where you see bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch.4), this refers to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).

Introduction

As a discipline, IR began to engage more thoroughly with alternative theoretical research about the same time as the first Gulf War. Is the incorporation of normative theory, historical-sociology, feminist work, post-modernism, and post-colonial scholarship simply a new academic fad? Was the emergence of constructivism within the discipline a similar development? Or did the Gulf War somehow make these theories more attractive – and if so, why did it have that effect? You should also consult the Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism sections for important alternatives to the theories discussed here. The purpose of this section is to suggest ways in which the insights from Chapter 10, and to a lesser extent Chapter 9, of *The Globalization of World Politics (7e.)* illustrate important aspects of the first Gulf War.

We will briefly focus on three discussions: **1) the speed of war; 2) the "reality" of the Gulf War;** and **3) identity politics as productive of war.** As with the previous section, the following cannot constitute an exhaustive survey of the ways these theories might help you think about the 1990-91 Gulf War and its aftermath.

1) The "videographic speed of war"

How we can ever know what really goes on during a war? Some scholars suggest that, in addition to well-known cases of media manipulation and spin (Carruthers 2000), advanced forms of technology have increasingly created a discrepancy between knowledge and reality. By 1991, the US military relied heavily on precision-guided munitions (PGMs) such as cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs, as well as the new F111 Stealth Fighter. These technologies were used for critical targets, including telecommunication centres, intelligence headquarters, and Saddam Hussein's Baath Party offices, as well as oil refineries, power stations, weapons bunkers, aircraft shelters and Iraqi radar centres. For "post-modern" warfare, increases in altitude, speed, endurance and carrying capacity are less sought after than improvements in agility, versatility and electronics. Remotely piloted vehicles and unmanned aerial vehicles are increasingly operational.

This technological development, however, comes at a price. Mediated by technology and the speed of events, the "reality" of warfare may have become removed, as TV images of smart bombs create an image of so-called "video-game war". In addition, the "multifarious effects of speed", according to James Der Derian, include the "instantaneity of communication, the ubiquity of the image, the flow of capital, the videographic speed of war [which] have made reality a transitory, technologically contingent phenomenon" (1996: 279-80). Leaders have become much more aware of the need for a clean, surgical and to a certain extent "death-free" representation of war.

2) A War That Didn't Happen?

This argument has been taken further by Jean Baudrillard, who suggested that the combination of massive military superiority and the revolution in surveillance and information gathering technology have rendered the presentation of war on CNN as more important than events on the ground; only simulation is possible, because reality cannot be distinguished from revelation. According to Baudrillard, this occurred to an extreme during the Gulf War - in which the militarily superior United States employed a ubiquitous propaganda-machine – that in 1995 he felt vindicated in sarcastically stating, "The Gulf War did not exist".

Box 4.1: Remember the Gulf War?

Remember the Gulf War? Or was it last season's hit show? The Gulf War was fought to demolish a memory [of Vietnam], but it was also a war that produced no memory. It was our first 'television war': not blood and guts spilled in living colour on the living room rug, not the transparent, objective immediacy of the all-seeing eye... but a radically distanced, technically controlled, eminently 'cool' post-modern optic which, in the doing, became an instrument of the war itself.

Bruce Cumings, War and Television, p.103

Baudrillard and others questioned how the most powerful Western leaders could assess the "reality" of what they were seeing on the computer and video screen. They asked, if citizens no longer experience warfare in any meaningful sense, can war truly be said to "exist" for them?

In the words of David Campbell, interpretivism (his term for what we describe as 'postmodernism') "acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the 'real causes' [of events and phenomena], and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another" (1992: 4). This framework questions whether we have lost the capacity to distinguish reality from the simulation of warfare, and if so, whether we should follow Campbell's suggestion of focusing instead on the political consequences of accepting one narrative of war and conflict over others.

3) Identity Politics and Representations

For postmodernism, world politics is less about war between states than contestation between rival interpretations of the world. If knowledge is power, then the construction of reality and history becomes possible through discourse. Thus the manipulation of "Truths" is not something that occurs only in war-torn societies, but also in the West. In these cases, the articulation of Truth by national leaders both defines the identity of the state and the threat to it.

Box 4.2: Danger and the Production of Identity

In announcing that the United States was sending military forces to Saudi Arabia, President Bush declared: 'In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe'. By manifestly linking American identity to danger, the President highlighted the indispensability of interpretation to the determination of a threat... [T]he boundaries of a state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy.

David Campbell, Writing Security, p.3

The role of identity in international politics is the central question of the constructivist field of IR theory. Constructivists interpret the importance and consequences of identity in many different ways, including both post-positivist approaches such as those detailed above, and more positivist frameworks which might be criticized by many alternative theorists (Horowitz, 2002). In one particular interpretation, Edward Said asserts that Iraq's defiance in the Gulf War posed a threat to American constructions of its national identity.

Box 4.3 Delta Force against Arab-Muslim desperadoes

Nearly every recent movie about American commandos pits a hulking Rambo or a whizlike Delta Force against Arab-Muslim terrorist desperadoes. Now it is as if an almost metaphysical need to defeat Iraq has come into being, not because Iraq's offence, though great, is cataclysmic, but because a small non-white country has rankled a suddenly energized supnation imbued with a fervour that can only be satisfied with subservience from shaikhs, dictators, and camel jockeys. The truly acceptable Arabs are those like Sadat who can be made to seem almost completely purified of their national selfhood - folksy talk show guests.

Edward Said, The Politics of Dispossession, p.298

During the Gulf War, both President George H. W. Bush and Saddam Hussein legitimated their behaviour in terms of symbolic practices in order to influence perception, but also to construct their own identities. For example, even though the most technologically advanced air power did not always have to be used, Bush had an incentive to portray US weapons as omnipresent and infallible to reassure allies, impress public audiences, and increase the credibility of threats (Buzan and Herring, 1998:192-198). The emphasis on US technological superiority and effectiveness helped to produce a US national identity predicated on these characteristics. Thus identity not only helped to construct the

understanding of Iraq as threat that led to the Gulf War, it affected the conduct of the conflict. Although this argument is one particular interpretation of identity politics, it falls within the general consensus of constructivist scholarship that much identity generation and maintenance occurs intersubjectively (Wendt, 1992).

Web links

www.un.org/Docs/scres/1990/scres90.htm

This webpage contains links to UN Resolutions 660 and 678, which ordered Saddam Hussein to withdraw Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

www.cryan.com/war/speech/

This website displays transcript to President Bush's speech September 11, 1990 speech to Congress, which outlined US interests in repelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf

Public Broadcasting System website that contains a chronology of events before and during the war; a collection of relevant maps; descriptions of the weapons technology used by Allied Forces; and oral histories and interviews from key decision-makers, analysts, and soldiers.

archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-71-593/conflict_war/gulf_war/

This Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archive contains news clips and coverage of the Gulf War.

digitaljournalist.org/issue0212/pt_index.html

This photo essay by Peter Turnley documents on-the-ground events during the Gulf War.

www.iaea.org/OurWork/SV/Invo/index.html

Website of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Iraq Nuclear Verification Office (INVO), which under United Nations Resolution 687 was charged with "uncovering and dismantling Iraq's clandestine nuclear programme; and developing and implementing an Ongoing Monitoring and Verification (OMV) System."

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