

AN EXAMINATION OF “RATIONALITY” ON PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH (JR) SECOND GULF WAR INTELLIGENCE

David Oluwafemi Bodunde *****

Department of Intelligence and Security Studies
Afe-Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
bodavisng@yahoo.com

Abstract

The world is faced with a series of security problems and the need to address such problems depends on the leaders at the helm of affairs. International problems such as the threat of terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction cannot be treated with levity, they require deep thinking with a rational mind to prevent or cause war. However, the issue of leadership committing his nation to war or not is been addressed within the corridor of exercise of power. Critical case of the second Gulf war had questioned the rationality of President George Bush (Jnr) in prosecuting the war despite opinion polls that were against it. Since the war attracted political and academic debate bothering on rationality, it is worthwhile to attempt this paper by examining President George Bush's (Jnr) rationality or otherwise in going for the war. The paper is based on qualitative analysis with the application of textbooks, journals, periodicals, and adopted interviews published on the websites. It also concluded that rationality is a beauty in the eye of the beholder and that American foreign policies are the instruments that any of its leaders must follow to achieve national interest based on primacy, democratic philosophy, and a world order based on his degree of rationality.

Keywords: Decision making, Rationality, Threat, Security, National interest

Introduction

America in world politics occupies an enviable position with its foreign policy philosophy of promoting the national interest, world order, collective security, and championing the embracement of democracy all over the world. However, these ideologies do not go unchallenged by certain countries such as Iraq, Iran, and North- Korea among others on the ground that America is spreading imperialism under the guise of democracy. America has its political ambition in the Middle -East and challenges to

***** Dr. David Oluwafemi Bodunde is with the Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Afe-Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

this ambition called for serious conflict between them, especially between America and Iraq. This conflict called for national decisionmaking against Iraq with various accusations of terrorism, possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and threat to Middle- East security. The accusation now metamorphosed into a national policy decision on whether to go for war or not against Iraq (Palmer & Pekins, 2007).

The decision to go to war generated serious political debate on two intelligence issues which centred on whether Sadam Hussein the then Iraq leader portends a security threat to America and the Middle -East by possessing the Weapons of Mass Destruction and also belonged to the axis of terrorism as alleged by American intelligence report. These issues attracted political debate and intelligence scrutinizing which later graduated from American national interest to world opinion polls where the majority disagreed with Bush in going to war including American politicians both from the Senate and House of Representatives. However, one thing that is central to this paper is the latitude of the American president in going to war in defiance of public opinions including that of the lawmakers. The power for doing so by President George Bush (Jnr) also becomes an academic issue in this paper on the temerity of the president to declare unilateral war on the premise of rationality despite serious criticisms.

However, it may be argued in another dimension that the influence of his leadership personality coupled with his idiosyncrasies are attributes of his rationality for doing so, or the issue of cognitive dissonance and bounded rationality may also pave way for him to make policy decisions on his own. The main objectives of this study, therefore, are to examine the role of George Bush (Jnr) as a rational actor in the decision-making of the second Gulf war, the factors that support a rational actor's decision-making in a nation's foreign policy for war, and also to subject President George Bush rationality into political analysis whether it was justified or not to refuse intelligence report that did not favour the second Gulf war?.

Statement of the Problem

One of America's cardinal principles is to sustain its hegemony all over the world. However, the sustenance of this hegemony is hinged on the American primacy and national interest in which the influence of rational actors is of immense importance. The image of America is seen in its president's behaviour, latitude, and other characteristics lumped in the rubric of leadership's idiosyncrasy. This is the more reason why the American president if commits any policy mistake though criticism may

follow such mistake will be seen as America's mistake. Despite this, it is still an argument whether it is justifiable for President George Bush to rely on rationality to commit his state to war by setting aside intelligence reports? In democracies, public opinions, intelligence reports, and bureaucratic and political Party's decisions take immense importance in shaping the behaviour of an actor in decision-making in foreign policy. Again, a nation's president must consider the implication of his actions in foreign policy execution, especially on war but when George Bush seemed to fail on this issue his final decision to prosecute the war against Iraq now becomes a subject of debate.

Rational Actor Model Theory

This study is anchored on the rational actor model. The primary goal of foreign policy is to ensure state survival and preservation of national interest. From this viewpoint, strategic calculations about national security and war are the primary determinants of policy makers' choices. The decision-making process of each state can be studied as though each is a unitary actor that determines national interests which are typically described as a rational actors. Charles (2007, p.67) applying the definition of verbal (1969) said:

We define rationality or rational choice here as a purposeful goal, directed behaviour exhibited when the individual responding to an international event, uses the best information available and chooses from the universe of possible responses that are alternative, and most likely to maximize his goal. Rationality in decision-making is often more an idealized standard than an accurate description of real-world behaviour.

The elusive quest for rational decision-making was illuminated in the crises of the Second Gulf War. George Bush made the world know that he was following the rule of rational choice in declaring war against terrorism and Saddam Hussein. He did this through diplomacy to alert the world to the danger posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction up to the door of the United Nations. At last, his rationality was criticized by Australia who challenged Bush to show evidence that justified it or else the understanding might amount to might is right which no international authority will support. Republican Senator Hagel was also worried that Bush failed to address some fundamental questions such as: what allies will America have? Who governs after Saddam? What is the objective? Have we calculated the consequences? What does the war mean for the unfinished work with Afghanistan? For the Israeli and Palestinian conflict? The truce between nuclear-armed India and Palestinian?

Despite the criticisms against Bush's rationality, he developed cognitive dissonance by disregarding all the alternative options that will not make the war possible as he viewed his own decision to go to war as most just. The rational debate of 2002 demonstrated as constructivists warned that rationality is a decision-making goal to which all international actors aspire but that it is difficult to determine when criteria for rational choice have been met. This raises the question, what are the barriers to rationality? Examining the various impediments that rational actors could come across in decision-making, Sorensen (1963:19 – 20) viewed that each step cannot be taken in order. The fact may be in doubt or dispute, several politics, all goals may conflict; stated goals may be imprecise. There may be many interpretations of what is right, what is possible, and what is in the national interest.

Expanding the concept of bounded rationality, as an impediment to the realization of rational choice promises in foreign policy making, Hahnemann (2003) said: Some of the barriers that make errors in foreign policy so common are human, deriving from deficiencies in the intelligence, capability and psychological needs and aspirations of foreign policy decisionmakers. Moving further is the factor of cognitive dissonance or negative information against the matter he is pruned to decide based on first impression or tuition. This is the more reason policymakers sometimes pay little heed to warnings and overlook information about dangers so that they repeat their past mistakes.

The relevance of this theory enables the leadership of a country to define in broad terms the foreign policy direction of a nation. Again, the concept has also become one of the dominant paradigms in studying political phenomena this is because human beings are prime movers of international politics which solely rests on power and decision making. Again it enables the analysts to understand the nature and factors that contribute to the enhancement of power and leadership behaviours in international relations. It also provides critical analysis that various foreign policies are simply the policies of the leaders in the realm of affairs and the success and failure of such foreign policies depend on the leadership in power. The weakness of this theory rests on the fact that rational actors in decisions making today give room to untamed and barbaric forces which find their laws in nothing but their strengths and sole justification in their political aggrandizement.

The 2nd Gulf War and President George Bush (Jnr) Role

The Second Gulf War stemmed from the 9/11 issue and the positive reactions of the Middle -East leaders to such terrorism. Moreover, other principal related factors generated accusations against Iraq such as

terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and Iraq as a threat to the Middle East and American citizens, for example, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Other strategic issues are the sustenance of American dominance in the Middle East, American interest in the political economy of the Middle East which centred on oil, and American ambition and the protection of Israel's political interest against Arab nationalism which Saddam criticized. Hussein also criticized western civilization in the Middle East. Others are the Iraq military, economic capabilities, dominance in the Middle East, and Saddam Hussein's international bellicosity that constantly challenged American hegemony in the Middle East.

However, three contentious issues stood out among all these factors that made America invade Iraq in the second Gulf war. They were accusation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and Threat. These issues also generated intelligence and political debate among American citizens and lawmakers. However, from the intelligence report, it was discovered that no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq neither it was an axis of terrorism nor a threat to Middle East affairs. This was supported by the leader of the Iraq intelligence survey group (ISG) David Kay when he noted that "the ISG has not found evidence that Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction stock in 2003..."

Hans Blix backed up the report Kay and said that up to this day the United States and Britain had not presented him with the evidence that they claimed to possess regarding Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction (Guardian, 2002, p.20). However, Powell with the political will of President George Bush rejected the intelligence report that did not support the war but forced the American intelligence community to pervert unorthodoxy and make the whole scenario to suit Americans and the world that Iraq possessed these Weapons when he presented intelligence report thus: Put down a case that I think convincingly demonstrates that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and terrorist organization. And I made this case before the world again that we cannot step back from this challenge".

President Bush making up allegations of threats and terrorism and weapons of mass destruction said:

But what wasn't wrong was Saddam Hussein had invaded a country, he had used weapons of mass destruction, and he had the capacity of mass destruction. He was firing at our pilots. He was a state sponsor of Terrorism--"<http://www.iraq and weapons of mass destruction.html>)

Moreover, the political climate of America after the 9/11 episode and the antecedent threats alleged against Iraq made President Bush (Jnr) apply his favoured intelligence, diplomacy, and strategic and international support to prosecute the war. Article 1373 of September 28, 2001, gave America to defend itself against terrorism which allowed Bush to invoke a pre-emptive attack on Rough states. President Bush's elusive quest for rational decisionmaking was to make the world understand that he was fighting terrorism against the axis of evil. He made the American intelligence community predate and circumvents traditional intelligencegathering operations and presented a fake report to the public as real evidence against Iraq. He diplomatically presented to his senate and the world an optimistic best scenario of the war, introduced the "coalition of the willing" strategy to the war on the ground of sympathy and principles; applied strategies to gain support through aid and loan, military assistance, world Bank assistance and benefit from (AGOA) African Growth and Opportunities Act to countries that supported the invasion. He also mounted intelligence surveillance to know the position of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the U.K which were part of its intelligence echelon. However, he got the mandate through maneuvering of the senate and coalition of the willing without recourse to U.N authorization.

The Analysis of George Bush (Jnr) Rationality in the Second Gulf War

The decision to go to war is a foreign policy issue. Within the foreign policy decision, a leader at the helm of affairs plays a vital role in decision-making. Under the rational actor model, President George Bush (Jnr) represents a state. Bodunde (2006, p.10) in his explanation said;

The behaviour of a state is nothing but the behaviour of its decision-makers. A state is abstract; it is individuals who make decisions in the name of the state and in doing so they reflect their interests and biases. A nation's foreign policy at any given period is a reflection of its incumbent.

Supporting this proposition Sullivan (1976, p.19) enunciated the factors that supported rational actor behaviour in foreign policy-making thus; "Behaviour in the international system is due to an individual's desire, goals, perceptions, beliefs, or other elements lumped together under the rubric of individuals' idiosyncrasies. Again, Bush's elusive quest for rational decisionmaking was criticized by Australia which challenged Bush to show evidence of rationality including Republican senator Hegel who accused Bush of failing to address fundamental issues such as what allies would America have? Who governed Iraq after the war? What were the objective,

the consequence, and implications for Afghanistan's unfinished war and Israel and Palestinian conflict? It is to be noted from these questions that Hegel wanted strict compliance with the principles of rationality before any action was taken by Bush for such war. Therefore what are the conditions that influence rationality in the decision-making for such war? There are factors such as the influence of transnational actors which reflect the decision of individuals and stakeholders who are free to make choices and contribute to the direction of trends in world politics. Supporting this, Hosni Mubarak described the decision-making process in the following terms:

Whenever you adopt any decision in war, you have, to listen to all the specialists who argue with the leader. ...we have to discuss everything openly and deliberately. Then the commander makes his decision (Rodenbeck, 2011, p.6).

Other conditions to be considered along these multinational actors are; the global conditions that prevail at the time of decision which provide constraints and opportunities for international decision, internal or domestic characteristics of the transnational actor such as wealth, military might, and public opinions, characteristics of individuals who are the decisionmakers such as values, personalities beliefs, and prior experience; again the influence of experts on security intelligence to give direction and intelligence opinions on the intentions and capabilities of the rival nations and the direction to be followed by the rational actor. Bush may have followed the global trend of anarchy and invoked his leadership rationality to meet the exigency of the time. Moreover, conflicting opinions within bureaucratic politics may have allowed rational actors like Bush to take a unilateral decision. Bureaucracy indeed favours standard operating procedure but surprisingly participants in the policy-making that led to the decision for the war may favour policy alternatives that serve their organization and political party's needs hence giving the president the latitude to choose his own choice of decision. Again Bush may have taken excuse from the 9/11 issue where intelligence report on early warning against terrorist attack was bypassed by the morass of cross-cutting bureaucracies; the more reason why he did not want the threat from President Sad am to mature.

Neumann (2007) opined that indifferences and not rationality are the hallmark of bureaucracy. Bush may have also taken this indifference among the bureaucrats to take his own rational decision for the war. Moreover, leaders like Bush (Jnr) are also movers of world history, they make history regarding their rational choices in decision making hence Wendze (1980)

opined that: citizens are not alone in thinking that leaders are the decisive determinants of states' foreign policies and by extension, world history. Leaders themselves seek to create the impression of their self-importance while attributing extraordinary power to other leaders. The assumptions they make about the personalities of their counterparts, consciously or unconsciously in turn influence their behaviours. Also, consider the concept of instrumental rationality, it pictures leaders as powerful decision-makers who base their perceptions and interpretations to build expectations, plan, strategize and urge actions on their government about what is possible (Hermann and Hagan 2004). When faced with two alternative options they can rationally make the choice they believe will produce their preferred outcome.

This is what fissured on second Gulf war issues when Bush decided to rationalize the whole option faced with a series of options and chose the alternative best for him. Instrumental rationality allows him to select policy choices that would maximize the likelihood of achieving his desired goal. Furthermore, an international crisis like the second Gulf war issue and terrorism are potent circumstances that increase the power of a leader like George Bush to have control over decision-making. Decision-making during crisis is centralized and handled typically by top leadership. Rationality indeed requires each step to be taken severally such as problem recognition, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and choice but impediments to rationality are not usually considered by the critics. This is the more reason why Sorensen (1963) argues the difficulties of strict adherence to these steps in the following terms.

Each step cannot be taken in order. The fact may be in doubt or dispute. Several policies, all good may conflict, several means all bad may be all that is open. Value judgment may differ, and stated goals may be imprecise. There may be many interpretations of what is right, what is possible, and what is in the national interest.

Here bounded rationality is more common as decision-makers typically only approximate what is possible and what is in the national interest. Therefore what is the national interest of George Bush was to destroy the apparatus of terrorism, Saddam Hussein's autocracy, and international bellicosity and to sustain American interest in the Middle East among all other issues. The more reasons George Bush developed cognitive dissonance to brush aside decisions that are not favourable to his ambition including intelligence reports to pursue a national interest in the Middle East. Notwithstanding, when the war ended, Bush regretted his decision to the American citizens and the world in the following terms: "I fully

understand that the intelligence was wrong and I was disappointed as everybody else. Despite this, his action represented the foreign policy action of the state he was representing at that time.

Though a certain school of thought may have condemned President George Bush's rationality during the second Gulf War, it may also be difficult to condemn his behaviour as irrational or praise him as being rational judging from his apology. However, caution must be exercised following the dictum of Burchill in Jervis (2000, p.40) from which world political issues are to be addressed in the following terms: Theorists believe we should be just as concerned with how we approach the study of world politics as we are explaining events, issues, and behaviours of actors in the global system. It may be opined that the character of the actor represents that of his state and he has the latitude to take any action on behalf of his state therefore what is rational or irrational may continue to be a subject of debate. Leading support to this, Fahrenthold and Kane (2011) opined:

However, like beauty, rationality often lies in the eye of the beholder, and reasonable, clearthinking people can and often do disagree about the facts and wisdom of foreign policy goals. It is to be noted here that the foreign policy goals of America are what any American president will be pursuing in a global environment.

It may be that part of American goals includes American primacy all over the world, its hegemony in the Middle East, the democratic institution in the middle-East and the war against terrorism which president George Bush (Jnr) pursued recently. Therefore, the American foreign policies which were on the ground even before President George Bush came to power are to be examined along with rationality, not the rational or irrational attitude that Bush may have imposed on it. Although elites, academics, philosophers, and world opinions may continue to disagree with one another about President George Bush's (Jnr) rationality on his foreign policy decision to go to war against Iraq in the second Gulf War, we may still borrow the word of Nixon in favour of Bush rationality in his foreign policy decision the following terms. The world has changed and our foreign policy must change with it (Charles & Shannon 2013, p.33).

Conclusion

World affairs attract various contemporary issues of international relations in which nations are out to protect their national interest with the instrument of exercise of power.

However, various political interests may conflict with the actor's rationality but achieving his goal of sustaining national interest will prevail at that time. Moreover, various factors may stand in favour of rationality but such a leader may possess the latitude to brush them aside with his cognitive or psychological dissonance in favour of national interest knowing fully well that his decision contravenes public opinions. Again, rationality is a beauty in the eye of the beholder, what is rational to somebody may not be rational to others, the reason why it is very difficult to rightly condemn a leader for his action taken on the ground of national interest. Finally, war is not the only solution to achieving peace and security, therefore, leaders must take a rational decision that opinion polls favour most for the achievement peace and security.

References

- Bodunde, D.O. (2006). Leadership personality and Nigerian foreign policy: A case study of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 - 2006). Unpublished Master of Science degree project, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.
- Charles, W.K. & Shannon, L.B. (2013). *World politics: Trend and transformation* (2012 – 2013) (Ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Charles, W. K. (Jnr.) (2007). *World politics: Trend and transformation* (11th Ed.) Thomson, Georgia: Thomson Higher Education.
- Chester, A.C, Fen, O.H., & Pamela, A. (2006). *Turbulence peace: The challenges of international conflict*. Washington DC: United State Institute of Peace.
- Herman, M.G., Hagan, J.D. (2004). International decision making: Leadership matters. In K.A. Mingst & J.L. Snyder (Eds.), *Essential readings in world politics* (pp.182-188), 2nd ed. New York: Norton.
- Jervis, R. (2000). *Why intelligence fail: Lesson from Iranian revolution and the Iraq war*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Kahneman, D. (2003). Map of bounded nationality: Psychology for behavioral economics. *American Economic Review*, 93(5), 1449-1475.
- Neumann, I.B. (2007). "A speech that the entire ministry may stand for," or: Why diplomats never produce anything new. *International Political Sociology*, 1(2), 183-200.
- Palmer, N.D. & Pekin, H.C. (2007). *International relations* (3rd revised edition). India: A.I.T.B.S. Publishers and Distributors.
- Powel, C. (2004). Pre-war data given to U.N. "not solid" – Powel. Australia Broadcasting Corporation. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200404/S/080433.htm>.

- Rodenbeck, M. (2011). Volcano of rage. *The New York Review* (March 24) 4-7.
- Sorenses A. & Theodor, C. (1963). *Decision making in the White House*. New York: Columbia Press.
- Sullivan, M.P. (1976). *International relations: Theories and evidence*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- The Guardian (2003). Hans Blix statement to the UN on Iraq weapons of mass destruction. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/27/iraq.unitednations1>
- Wendzel R.L. (1980). *International relations: A policy maker focus*. New York: Wiley.