



## September 11 and the Challenges of Peacekeeping Since The 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Examining The U.S-Led Coalition of The Willing in Iraq in 2003

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**ABSTRACT:** The study investigated the September 11 attack and the challenges of peacekeeping in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with particular reference to the U.S-led coalition of the willing in Iraq in 2003. The study addressed how the September 11 attacks transformed global security, placing counter-terrorism at the centre of international operations. This change challenged traditional peacekeeping principles of neutrality, consent, and limited force. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq exemplifies the resulting tensions between unilateral security strategies and established peacekeeping norms. The objectives of the study were to examine how the September 11 attacks influenced global security strategies and reshaped the conduct of international peacekeeping operations in the twenty-first century, and to analyse the motivations and strategic justifications behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States-led Coalition of the Willing during the Iraq War. The study adopted the Realist Theory propounded by Morgenthau in 1948. The study utilized descriptive research design and applied secondary sources of data. Data were sourced from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and academic publications that examined the causes, conduct, and consequences of the Iraq War, as well as the transformation of peacekeeping operations. Additional sources comprised official reports and documents from international organisations such as the United Nations, government publications from the United States and allied states, and reports produced by international policy institutions and research organisations. The study found that the September 11 attacks shifted global security focus toward counter-terrorism, forcing peacekeeping missions to operate in unstable areas with armed non-state groups. This change challenged traditional rules of neutrality and limited force, requiring peacekeepers to take on more complex roles. The study recommended that international peacekeeping operations should include counter-terrorism measures while continuing to respect major principles such as neutrality, human rights, and cooperation through multilateral institutions like the United Nations to remain credible and effective in unstable conflict areas.

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### INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks of September 11 represented a major turning point in the global security landscape and, importantly, transformed the strategic environment in which peacekeeping and international security operations are carried out. Before 2001, most international peacekeeping missions primarily organised through institutions such as the United Nations were typically based on the presence of ceasefires, negotiated peace agreements, and the consent of the main parties involved in a conflict. The events of September 11, however, reshaped this framework by placing transnational terrorism at the forefront of international security concerns and encouraging states to adopt more forceful and interventionist strategies in addressing conflicts (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). Consequently, the early years of the twenty-first century saw the emergence of increasingly complex security operations in environments where long-standing peacekeeping principles such as neutrality, minimal use of force, and host-state approval became more difficult to maintain.

Following the attacks, the administration of George W. Bush advanced a doctrine of pre-emptive security, arguing that the growing threat posed by terrorist organisations required proactive military action against states believed to provide them with support or haven. This strategic approach eventually led to the creation of the “Coalition of the Willing”, a group of states spearheaded by the United States that carried out the 2003 invasion of Iraq during the Iraq War. The intervention was largely justified by claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and maintained connections with terrorist networks (Dodge, 2005). Although these assertions were later widely questioned, the invasion nonetheless marked an important shift in the nature of international security interventions by blurring the lines between conventional peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and externally driven regime change.

In the post-9/11 context, scholars have described the transformation of peacekeeping as a robust turn, reflecting the increasing deployment of international missions in unstable environments marked by insurgency, terrorism, and fragmented state authority (Paris, 2010). Instead of supervising agreements between clearly identifiable warring parties, many contemporary operations now take place in situations where comprehensive peace accords are absent and where armed non-state groups challenge both international forces and emerging national institutions. These changing conditions have created significant operational and normative difficulties, including greater risks to peacekeeping personnel, mandates that are often unclear or overly ambitious and rising debates about the legitimacy of foreign intervention (Fortna & Howard, 2008). In Iraq, the lack of an accepted political settlement and the rapid disintegration of state structures after the invasion complicated stabilisation efforts and revealed the limitations of externally imposed security arrangements.

Moreover, the invasion of Iraq intensified international debates about the legality and legitimacy of military coalitions operating without clear multilateral authorisation. The limited involvement of the United Nations Security Council in approving the intervention weakened the normative basis of international peace operations and deepened divisions among major powers (Thakur, 2006). The controversy surrounding the coalition’s actions, therefore, raised concerns about whether post-9/11 security strategies were undermining the cooperative principles that had historically guided peacekeeping efforts. Conversely, supporters of the intervention argued that emerging global security threats demanded more adaptable coalitions capable of responding quickly to perceived risks, even in situations where international consensus was difficult to achieve.

Within this context, the U.S.-led coalition intervention in Iraq provides an important case study for understanding the evolving challenges confronting peacekeeping in the twenty-first century. The operation demonstrates how counter-terrorism priorities, assertive security doctrines, and contested questions of international legitimacy can influence the objectives and implementation of post-conflict stabilisation efforts.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The September 11 attacks greatly changed global security policies and the way international peace and security operations are carried out. After the attacks, fighting terrorism became a major priority for the United States and many of its allies. Because of this, military interventions began to focus not only on counter-terrorism but also on removing governments, stabilising conflict areas, and rebuilding state institutions. One of the most debated examples of this approach was the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the U.S.-led coalition during the Iraq War. The invasion was justified by claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and links to terrorist groups. However, when strong evidence was not found, many scholars and policymakers questioned the legality and impact of the intervention (Dodge, 2005; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008).

The main issue comes from the conflict between traditional peacekeeping principles and the new security strategies that developed after 9/11. Traditional peacekeeping operations, often organised through the United Nations, are usually based on major principles such as neutrality, the agreement of the parties involved, and the limited use of force (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). However, the invasion of Iraq did not fully follow these principles. The intervention took place without clear approval from the United Nations Security Council and depended mainly on a group of supportive countries rather than a widely accepted international mandate. This raised concerns that powerful states might ignore international institutions when using military force, which could weaken global rules and systems meant to maintain peace and security (Thakur, 2006).

Another part of the problem relates to the challenges that appeared after the invasion during the effort to stabilise Iraq. When the Iraqi government was removed, many state institutions collapsed, violence increased, and insurgent and extremist groups began to grow. Because of these conditions, coalition forces had to carry out tasks that went beyond normal peacekeeping roles. These included fighting insurgent groups, rebuilding government institutions, and providing humanitarian support. The lack of a peace agreement and the absence of stable political leadership made it very difficult to restore order and achieve long-term stability. Thus, interventions without a strong political framework often struggle to create lasting peace, especially in societies with deep political or ethnic divisions (Paris, 2010; Fortna & Howard, 2008).

In addition, the Iraq intervention increased international debates about whether coalition-based military actions are legitimate and effective in dealing with modern security threats. Relying on coalitions of willing states shows a growing pattern where powerful countries act alone or with selected partners instead of following broader international agreements. This could weaken collective decision-making in global politics (Ikenberry, 2003). It also raises concerns about the future role of international organisations in managing conflicts and maintaining peace.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Examine how the September 11 attacks influenced global security strategies and reshaped the conduct of international peacekeeping operations in the twenty-first century.
2. Analyse the motivations and strategic justifications behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States-led Coalition of the Willing during the Iraq War.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Concept of Terrorism**

Terrorism as a concept has been variously used in literature, but the major fact about the concept is that it lacks a generally acceptable definition, as there is no intellectual agreement on what constitutes the concept. The concept 'terrorism' became a major concern in Philosophy and Social Sciences following the early writings of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and other philosophers during the Enlightenment epoch and the qualitative effects of the French Revolution of 1789 on the European society. Though none of the above-mentioned philosophers singled out terrorism as a study, each commented on it in the course of explaining other pertinent social problems at the time (Ogunrotifa, 2013). However, the complexities and ambiguity of the concept occurred from the fact that it is prone to political and emotional interpretation. Even the International Community has not been able to develop a universal and permissible definition of terrorism. According to William (2009), during the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nations attempt to define the term foundered mainly due to differences of opinion between members about the use of violence in the context of conflicts on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. Therefore, the concept has been socially constructed, thereby making it impossible to reach a universal definition of the term.

Scholars have also viewed terrorism as a political, religious and economic expression and not necessarily a criminal act. Terrorism, in this perspective, is used to portray a wide range of dysfunctional actions within a political system. Therefore, it is essential to appreciate the work of Best and Nocella (2004), which posits that all terrorism involves violence, but not all violence is terrorism. This led them to define terrorism as the institutional use of physical violence directed against innocent persons/human or inhuman animals to advance the religious, ideological, political, or economic purposes of an individual, organisation, or state government. These scholars' definition helps to enrich our knowledge that the act of terrorism is geared towards achieving a specific purpose, and that violence is aimed at both the innocent and targeted persons. Be that as it may, the above definition is faced with the question of whether ethnic and regional purposes are not part of the reasons that give rise to terrorism. Therefore, this definition is only more applicable to a non-plural society where we have few or no ethnic groups.

In support of the above assertion of scholars, Al-Thagafi (2008) conceptualises terrorism as the use of either organised violence against innocent people to intimidate them for political reasons. This position can be questioned as it failed to explain the nature of the instigators of these violent acts, and also, whether the acts of terrorism are only for political reasons, as portrayed in the definition. Put differently, Enders and Sandler, cited in Antimbom (2016), posited that terrorism is the premeditated use of violence by individuals or sub-national groups to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of immediate victims. From this assertion, the scholars are of the opinion that violence is an emblem of terrorism, to the extent that some terrorist groups do engage in grisly violent behaviour to create extensive tension or revolt. Unlike the previous assertion, they viewed terrorism as violence generated by ethnic and regional groups. However, this definition is less embracing as it limits terrorism to sub-national groups and fails to take into cognisance state terrorism, a situation where a state/government terrorises its citizens or finances terrorist groups. Moreover, the definition only views terrorist attacks as public that necessarily involve a large audience who may force the state or government to compromise their claims or demands. Since there is no generally accepted definition of terrorism, Lentini (2008) asserted that the current arguments on the definition of terrorism revolve around what exactly constitutes terrorism and a terrorist attack. Based on this, so many scholars and policy analysts have made efforts to draw out the measures for differentiating terrorism from other forms of violence. However, some researchers argued that setting a globally acceptable definition of terrorism should be relative depending on the situation, location, motivations and national policies (Ugorji, 2017).

#### **Concept of Peacekeeping**

Peacekeeping refers to a range of activities designed to create conditions that support the achievement and maintenance of lasting peace in conflict-affected areas. Research indicates that peacekeeping interventions have contributed to reducing civilian and battlefield casualties and lowering the likelihood of renewed warfare (Fortna, 2008; Bellamy & Williams, 2013). At the international level, particularly within the United Nations framework, peacekeepers are tasked with monitoring and observing peace processes, supporting the implementation of peace agreements, and assisting ex-combatants in fulfilling their commitments. This support can take many forms, including confidence-building measures, power-sharing arrangements, electoral assistance, strengthening the rule of law, and facilitating economic and social development. Peacekeeping personnel, often referred to as Blue Helmets due to their distinctive headgear, include military soldiers, police officers, and civilian staff (Durch, 1993; Bellamy & Williams, 2013).

Although the United Nations is the primary actor in peacekeeping, other organisations also implement missions with varying mandates. For example, NATO conducted peacekeeping in Kosovo with UN authorisation, the European Union has deployed forces

such as EUFOR RCA, and the African Union has implemented missions like the African Union Mission in Sudan. Peacekeepers operate under international law as non-combatants, maintaining neutrality between belligerent parties and receiving protection from attack (Luck, 2006).

Scholars have categorised peacekeeping into multiple types, largely based on the mandate under which operations are authorised. Fortna (2008) distinguishes four main types:

**1. Observation Missions:** These are small teams of unarmed military or civilian observers responsible for monitoring ceasefires, troop withdrawals, or other elements of peace agreements. They report violations but lack enforcement power. Examples include UNAVEM II in Angola (1991) and MINURSO in Western Sahara.

**2. Inter-positional Missions (Traditional Peacekeeping):** These involve lightly armed forces deployed as buffers between former belligerents to monitor compliance with ceasefires. Examples include UNAVEM III in Angola (1994) and MINUGUA in Guatemala (1996).

**3. Multidimensional Missions:** These involve military, police, and civilian personnel tasked with broader responsibilities beyond observation, such as electoral supervision, institution-building, police reform, and economic development. Examples include UNTAG in Namibia, ONUSAL in El Salvador, and ONUMOZ in Mozambique (Bellamy & Williams, 2013).

**4. Peace Enforcement Missions:** Unlike consent-based “Chapter VI” operations, peace enforcement or “Chapter VII” missions do not require the agreement of all belligerents and are authorised to use force beyond self-defence. Examples include ECOMOG and UNAMSIL in West Africa and NATO operations in Bosnia, such as IFOR and SFOR (Fortna, 2008).

Traditional peacekeeping emphasises neutrality, consent, and limited use of force, with peacekeepers acting as symbols of impartiality between disputing parties. They operate in buffer zones, patrol ceasefires, and intervene minimally unless acting in self-defence. Historical deployments, such as UNIFIL in Lebanon (1982) or UNEF II in Egypt (1967), illustrate that consent is crucial and may be withdrawn, requiring peacekeepers to exit (Durch, 1993).

From the 1990s onward, the concept of peacekeeping evolved significantly due to the emergence of intrastate conflicts, guerrilla warfare, and complex civil wars. Traditional blue-helmeted operations were often inadequate for the challenges of modern conflicts, as seen in Somalia (1992–1995) and the former Yugoslavia (1992–1995). This period witnessed the rise of multidimensional peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peace support operations (PSOs), requiring forces capable of limited coercion to enforce agreements, separate warring parties, or restore order where consent and authority are ambiguous (Bellamy & Williams, 2013; Fortna, 2008; Durch, 1993). Early examples of coercive peacekeeping include the UN Congo mission (1960–1964), where troops used force to maintain freedom of movement and expel mercenaries. Modern PSOs recognise that in fragile states, non-combatant mandates may be insufficient, and operational flexibility is necessary to prevent mission failure, as in Rwanda (1994).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the Realist Theory propounded by Hans Morgenthau in 1948. The theory derives its impulse from the perspective that the nature of man is bad, sinful and conflictual. Realism holds that political theory must flow from observation of history and experience of people and of nation-states and that these show a pattern of violent and aggressive behaviour (Richard & Sinclair, 1996). Thus, the highest moral duty of the nation-state is its own preservation. To accomplish this, states must utilise power. According to Morgenthau (1978), the interest of the nation-state defined in terms of power, is the main moral guide in which policies are developed, but prudence in pursuing that interest is the primary ethical guide for policy makers. In the world of power politics, states must increase their power to guarantee their survival. According to Morgenthau (1978), thus, the goal of the state has come to include the search for ways to acquire and keep power, increase power and demonstrate power. In short, in a world of conflicting states seeking power, or a world confirmed by historical experience and by the nature of man, states must engage in power politics in order to survive, and they should do anything prudent or otherwise to achieve that goal.

According to Walker (1993), there is no single tradition of realism but rather a knot of historically constituted tensions, contradictions and evasions. There are therefore different types of realism which Timothy (1993) has distinguished into three: classical realism (up to the twentieth century), modern realism (1939-1979) and neo-realism (1979 to date). Timothy (1993) admits that this periodisation does not, however, overcome the problem of diversity since not all classical writers agree on the causes of war, or whether the balance of power is a natural state or one which must be created for the effective management of global power. Walker (1993) further distinguished between historical realism and structural realism. Machiavelli is regarded as the leading proponent of historical realism. He advocates a set of ideas which permit nation-state leaders to bring the external environment under their control. E.H Carr can be regarded as a modern Machiavelli. To Carr (1976), nations of power must advocate for a foreign policy which recognises the interplay of power and morality, force and appeasement. It is his idea that brutal force alone cannot keep and control any population in a state of perpetual submissiveness to authority.

On the other hand, structural realism can rightly be credited to Thucydides (430-400BC) and later to Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. Thucydides presents power politics as a law of human behaviour; he uses the “Melian dialogue”, one episode of the Peloponnesian war, to express the realist view of some key ideas such as self-interest, alliances, balance of power, capabilities and insecurity. Morgenthau (1978) elevated these principles to an unprecedented height in post-World War II academic discussion. To

him, nations must control other nations by force, acquire territories by force and must not have any moral consideration in respect of Justice, fairness and common interest. According to Ogonor (2007, p. 28-29), realism is hinged on the following assumptions.

1. The Realist Theory assume that there is no essential harmony of interest among nation-states and that nation-states often have conflicting national objectives, which often lead to war.
2. Realism posits that the capabilities of a state are important for the outcomes of international conflict and for the ability of one state to influence another state's behaviour.
3. Power, they believe, has a military and non-military component, which includes not only military force but also the level of technology, population, national resources, etc.
4. Realists posit that there are severe limitations to the extent to which political reforms can alter human nature. Man is evil, sinful and power-seeking. According to them, human nature is not innately good or perfectible.
5. Realists assumed that moral beliefs in their abstract formulation cannot apply to political actions.
6. Realists further believe that the balance of power framework can furnish an important regulation devises to deter any one nation from achieving total hegemony in the international system.

The Realist Theory is particularly relevant to this study as it offers a lens for understanding how states make strategic decisions in the post-9/11 international security landscape. Realism asserts that states act primarily to protect their national interests and security, often placing the pursuit of power and survival above adherence to international norms or ethical considerations (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). Regarding the 2003 intervention in Iraq by the United States-led Coalition of the Willing, Realist Theory provides insight into why the United States and its allies undertook military action in response to perceived threats, such as Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction and connections to terrorist networks, rather than relying solely on established multilateral peacekeeping frameworks or UN approval. The theory also explains the tendency of powerful states to act unilaterally or through selected coalitions when their strategic interests are at stake, as exemplified by the formation of the Coalition of the Willing. Moreover, Realism helps illuminate the conflict between traditional peacekeeping principles—including neutrality, the consent of parties, and limited use of force and the more interventionist, security-driven approaches that became prominent after September 11, 2001.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design to investigate the relationship between the September 11 attacks and the evolving nature of international peacekeeping in the twenty-first century, with particular emphasis on the intervention of the United States-led Coalition of the Willing in Iraq during the 2003 Iraq War. A descriptive research design was considered appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to systematically describe, analyse, and interpret events, policies, and developments related to international security and peacekeeping without manipulating any variables. The design focused on explaining how specific events and decisions unfolded, the contexts in which they occurred, and their implications for global peacekeeping practices. The study relied on secondary sources of data. These included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and academic publications that examined the causes, conduct, and consequences of the Iraq War, as well as the transformation of peacekeeping operations. Additional sources comprised official reports and documents from international organisations such as the United Nations, government publications from the United States and allied states, and reports produced by international policy institutions and research organisations. These materials provided insights into the political debates, strategic decisions, and institutional responses that shaped the coalition intervention in Iraq.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **How the September 11 Attacks Influenced Global Security Strategies and Reshaped the Conduct of International Peacekeeping Operations in the Twenty-First Century**

The September 11 attacks marked a critical turning point in global security, fundamentally reshaping how states approached their defence and the maintenance of international peace. The attacks consisted of four coordinated suicide hijackings carried out by 19 militants linked to al-Qaeda, resulting in nearly 3,000 deaths, 2,750 in New York City, 184 at the Pentagon, and 40 in Pennsylvania and extensive destruction (Miller, 2002; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). The magnitude and audacity of these attacks exposed the vulnerability of even the most powerful states to non-state actors, prompting a global reassessment of security priorities and peacekeeping approaches (Fitzpatrick, 2005). In response, the United States and its allies prioritised counter-terrorism as a central component of international security. This priority led to the creation of integrated intelligence networks, joint military exercises, shared databases, and coordinated law enforcement operations across borders to detect, prevent, and dismantle terrorist networks (Barak, 2006; Ramraj et al., 2012). Strategic focus shifted from traditional interstate threats to transnational terrorism, fundamentally altering the environments in which peacekeeping operations were conducted, which increasingly involved insurgencies, non-state actors, and fragile states (Bellamy & Williams, 2013).

The counter-terrorism response unfolded in multiple stages. First, the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 dismantled the Taliban and disrupted al-Qaeda networks, capturing major operatives and preventing further attacks (Byman, 2011). Second, the

2003 invasion of Iraq, justified by claims of weapons of mass destruction and alleged terrorist links, reshaped military operations and peacekeeping. The removal of the Iraqi government and the collapse of state institutions created a security vacuum, enabling the rise of insurgent groups, including the precursor to the Islamic State, demonstrating that aggressive counter-terrorism measures could complicate peacekeeping objectives (Dodge, 2005; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008). Third, domestically, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security centralised intelligence and law enforcement, linking domestic security with international counter-terrorism initiatives (Rosenau, 2007). Fourth, the U.S. expanded global counterterrorism efforts by training allied forces, sharing intelligence, and supporting governments in vulnerable regions, making counterterrorism a core component of international security strategies (Hoffman, 2017).

The attacks had a profound effect on international peacekeeping. Traditional UN missions, grounded in neutrality, consent, and limited use of force, had to adapt to environments influenced by terrorism, insurgency, and fragile state structures (Fortna, 2008; Paris, 2010). Peacekeeping missions increasingly became multi-dimensional, combining observation, interpositional roles, enforcement, and post-conflict stabilisation tasks. These missions required robust rules of engagement, proactive counterinsurgency strategies, and collaboration with military coalitions pursuing security-driven objectives.

Post-9/11 security measures also blurred the boundaries between war, counter-terrorism, and human rights. Practices such as extraordinary rendition, prolonged detentions, and cooperation with authoritarian regimes implementing strict counter-terrorism measures challenged international law and weakened multilateral institutions, forcing peacekeeping operations to navigate a complex environment where protecting human rights could conflict with strategic counterterrorism goals (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Barak, 2006). Evidence shows that since 2001, counter-terrorism has become a primary justification for military interventions, with over 200 U.S.-led operations conducted across more than 40 countries by 2020 (Global Terrorism Database, 2021). The global reach and frequency of these operations highlight the transformation of security strategies and their direct influence on peacekeeping, which now functions in a context of persistent, asymmetric threats rather than conventional interstate warfare.

In a nutshell, the September 11 attacks reshaped global security strategies by elevating counter-terrorism, broadening the scope and intensity of peacekeeping operations, and altering the legal and normative frameworks guiding international interventions. This transformation underscores the growing complexity of modern peacekeeping, requiring a balance among strategic objectives, force protection, human rights, and post-conflict stabilisation in environments dominated by non-state actors and transnational threats (Bellamy & Williams, 2013; Fortna, 2008; Paris, 2010).

### **Motivations and Strategic Justifications behind the 2003 Invasion of Iraq by the United States-led Coalition of the Willing during the Iraq War**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States-led 'Coalition of the Willing' was presented by the Bush administration and its allies as a necessary action to address perceived threats to both international and U.S. security. The U.S. government asserted that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and maintained connections with terrorist organisations, posing an imminent danger in the post-9/11 security climate (Dodge, 2005; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008). The September 11, 2001, attacks heightened global concerns about terrorism, providing a context in which pre-emptive military intervention was framed as a legitimate component of the "War on Terror" (Byman, 2011). The United States further argued that regime change in Iraq was essential to protect its citizens, safeguard strategic and economic interests, and promote democratic governance in light of the authoritarian nature of the Ba'athist regime (Ikenberry, 2003; Record, 2004).

The term Coalition of the Willing referred to the multinational military command organised to execute the invasion and manage subsequent operations. First articulated by President George W. Bush in November 2002 during a NATO summit, the coalition comprised states willing to support Iraq's disarmament, militarily or politically, if Saddam Hussein refused to comply with UN resolutions (Bush, 2002). By March 2003, the White House publicly listed 46 coalition members, later rising to 49 before being reduced to 48 following objections from Costa Rica. Of these, only four countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland provided combat troops for the invasion, while the remainder offered political, logistical, or limited military support (Althaus, 2010).

The motivations for joining the coalition varied. Some nations aligned with U.S. strategic objectives or shared security concerns, while smaller states, such as the Marshall Islands, Palau, and Micronesia, participated primarily due to economic dependencies and military agreements with the United States (Althaus, 2010). This diverse composition underscored the strategic employment of political alliances, military aid, and economic incentives to garner support for the intervention.

From a strategic perspective, the Bush administration framed the invasion as a pre-emptive measure designed to neutralise a potential existential threat before it could manifest. This reflected a post-9/11 shift in U.S. security doctrine toward unilateral or selectively multilateral action to protect national interests and counter transnational threats (Ikenberry, 2003). Additionally, the invasion sought to remove an authoritarian regime, which the United States argued would facilitate the establishment of democratic governance in Iraq and promote regional and global stability (Dodge, 2005; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008).

However, subsequent investigations revealed that major claims regarding WMDs and terrorist connections were unsubstantiated, fueling debates over the legitimacy of the intervention, the reliance on a coalition rather than UN authorisation, and the implications for international law and established peacekeeping norms (Thakur, 2006; Chesterman, 2006). The limited number of troop-

contributing countries highlighted the unilateral nature of the operation and emphasised the centrality of U.S. strategic priorities in both the decision to invade and post-invasion conduct. The coalition was temporary, reflecting the move in post-invasion Iraq. By 2009, most non-U.S. and non-UK coalition members had withdrawn, and the Multinational Force–Iraq transitioned into United States Forces–Iraq, marking the official end of the Coalition of the Willing and highlighting the dominant role of U.S. leadership in both the invasion and subsequent stabilisation efforts (Althaus, 2010).

In a nutshell, the 2003 invasion of Iraq was driven by national security concerns, counter-terrorism objectives, the perceived threat of WMDs, and the strategic goal of removing an authoritarian regime. These motivations were intertwined with geo-political calculations, alliance management, and pre-emptive military doctrine in the post-9/11 context. The invasion demonstrates how strategic imperatives, domestic political considerations, and international alliances intersect to shape contemporary military interventions and challenge traditional peacekeeping norms.

## FINDINGS

Based on the study, the following observations were made:

1. The study found that the September 11 attacks shifted global security focus toward counter-terrorism, forcing peacekeeping missions to operate in unstable areas with armed non-state groups. This change challenged traditional rules of neutrality and limited force, requiring peacekeepers to take on more complex roles.
2. The research showed that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was driven by claims of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism goals, and the aim of removing Saddam Hussein's government. Countries joined the coalition based on political ties or economic reliance on the United States, while the lack of proof for WMDs raised doubts about the legitimacy of the invasion.

## CONCLUSION

The September 11 attacks changed global security, shifting the focus of international peacekeeping toward counter-terrorism. Peacekeeping missions had to operate in unstable areas with insurgents, terrorist groups, and weak states, which challenged traditional rules of neutrality, consent, and limited use of force, requiring more flexible and multi-dimensional strategies. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq shows how post-9/11 security priorities shaped international actions. The invasion was justified by alleged WMD threats, counter-terrorism goals, and the aim of regime change, while coalition support was influenced by political ties and economic dependence. The lack of proof for WMDs and limited UN involvement raised doubts about the legitimacy of the intervention, highlighting the conflict between unilateral strategies and established peacekeeping principles. In all, the study shows that post-9/11 peacekeeping is more complex, combining counter-terrorism, state-building, and humanitarian tasks. The Iraq case emphasises the need for adaptive, multilateral approaches to ensure legitimate, effective, and lasting peace in today's conflicts.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the paper recommended the following:

1. International peacekeeping operations should include counter-terrorism measures while continuing to respect major principles such as neutrality, human rights, and cooperation through multilateral institutions like the United Nations to remain credible and effective in unstable conflict areas.
2. Military interventions led by coalitions should be based on confirmed intelligence and clear legal approval to ensure accountability, protect civilians, and limit disruptions to governance and stability after conflicts.

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