Iraq War [UPSC International Relations Notes]

The Iraq War of 2003 is an important event in international affairs, and its effects still persist to this day in West Asia. In this article, you can read all about the Iraq War, also called the American invasion of Iraq for the UPSC exam.

Iraq War (2003)

Saddam Hussein had been the president of Iraq since 1979. He was a dictator who ruled with an iron fist and crushed all opposition brutally. His term had been accused of widespread human rights violations, particularly against religious and ethnic minorities.

- He led Iraq to war against its neighbours, Iran and Kuwait. Read more on the Gulf War.
- The US led an invasion against Hussein-led Iraq in 2003 with a view to ousting him from power.
- The US gave two primary reasons for this invasion:
    - Iraq had stockpiled chemical and weapons of mass destruction.
    - The Iraqi administration had ties with and supported the terrorist organisation, Al-Qaeda.
- These were the purported reasons of the invasion, which never got official sanction from the United Nations Security Council.
- Many consider this invasion as illegal, since there was not enough intelligence about weapons of mass destruction, or ties with the Al-Qaeda. Moreover, there were allegations that the Bush administration fabricated evidence to garner support for the war.
- The US-led coalition forces comprised forces from the US, the UK, Poland and Australia with support from some local Iraqi groups.
- After the war, the claim of weapons of mass destruction was found to be untrue, since they were never found.
- It is noteworthy to point out that a few of America's traditional allies such as Germany, France, Canada and New Zealand did not approve of the invasion citing the lack of credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction.
- The invasion lasted for just over a month beginning in March 2003.
- The coalition forces occupied Iraq and most of the top leadership of Iraq went into hiding.
- Saddam Hussein was caught in December 2003 after a massive manhunt.
- After a trial, he was hanged to death in 2006 for crimes against humanity.

Aftermath of the Iraq War

The coalition forces, needless to say, never found any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The results of the war can be summarised in the following points:

- There was a power vacuum left after the fall of the Hussein regime. Many factions came to the fore each vying for control.
- Destruction of the highly centralized administration of Hussein threw the multi-ethnic country into chaos.
- The political chaos and the fact that many of Hussein's aides and government members, not to mention soldiers, lost jobs in one swoop in the wake of the invasion, this was fertile ground for the rise of another danger, ISIS.
- Even though Iraq got rid of a ruthless dictator, it had to see the rise of the Islamic State, which at one point, had control over a large area of Iraq and Syria.
- Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed since the war and millions have been displaced.
- Even though American troops withdrew from Iraq in 2011, insurgency has been going on there from 2011 onwards.

- Iraq saw democratic elections in 2005, and a functional government was in place. Still, there is high instability and human rights violations going on from different quarters.
- As of 2019, ISIS has been effectively defeated as it does not hold any territory in Iraq. However, lone wolf attacks and ideological warfare are continuing.