UNSC SUPPORT FOR RESOLUTION 1483: A PUZZLE OF MANUFACTURED LEGITIMACY AFTER THE IRAQ INVASION

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I firmly believe that we are shaped by the people around us and the experiences we share. This thesis is not solely a product of academic inquiry, but also of the relationships that nurtured my growth as a student and person. My love of learning - strengthened by their presence - is something that I will continue to carry with me long after my work is complete. This thesis represents a piece of my perspective: my attempt to understand this topic in its complexity and to share that understanding with others.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes how the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously passed resolution 1483 in May 2003, effectively legitimizing the United States led invasion of Iraq, despite widespread opposition from key UNSC members just two months prior. *Given that several UNSC members expressed strong opposition to the legitimacy of an invasion of Iraq, why did all UNSC members ultimately choose to support a resolution legitimizing it (i.e. Resolution 1483) just two months later (May 2003)?* This question is significant because it investigates how consensus may be created under strategic and geopolitical pressure, even within the chaos of an illegitimate military intervention. To answer this question, this thesis employs qualitative discourse analysis, and process tracing to examine the actions and rhetoric of key Security Council Members. Public opinion data is used to contextualize domestic and international responses to the invasion as well. Different International Relations theories are evaluated to determine which best explains the shift in voting behavior, with findings indicating neorealism as the most compelling theory. The analysis suggests that the United States used their power to impose diplomatic pressure, reframe legal norms, and advance national interests–producing a manufactured consensus. This study contributes to existing scholarship on institutional legitimacy and post-conflict governance by examining how consensus can emerge through political necessity in the shadow of power instead of shared principle.

I. INTRODUCTION

In international politics, the distinction between power versus principle oftentimes becomes misconstrued. Operation Iraqi freedom remains deeply controversial, even over two decades later. This initiative, launched by the US government under the Bush Administration (and co-sponsored by the UK), aimed to eliminate alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and to remove Saddam Hussein, a perceived threat to U.S. security, from power.[1] Bush specifically reaffirms that a regime change is necessary and says "It is too late for Saddam Hussein to remain in power" in his address to the nation in early march.[2] Despite claims made by U.S. intelligence, the Bush Administration lacked explicit UN Security Council authorization to move forward. This was not taken lightly within the international community. Key Security Council members such as France, Russia, and Germany strongly opposed the invasion on grounds of legality and morality. [3] Mass protests occurred in the US and abroad both before and after the war was officially started.[4] In other words, this war was always deeply controversial.

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[1] Council on Foreign Relations, *Timeline: The Iraq War*, accessed May 22, 2025, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war.

[2] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours: Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation," March 17, 2003, White House Archives, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html.

[3] The New York Times, "Joint Declaration on Iraq," March 5, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/joint-declaration-on-iraq.html.

[4] Imperial War Museums, "5 Photographs From the Day the World Said No to War," *Imperial War Museums*, accessed June 12, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/5-photographs-from-the-day-the-world-said-no-to-war.

Yet just two months later, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1483, which effectively granted the intervention a retroactive stamp of legitimacy. Resolution 1483 recognized the U.S. and U.K. as formal occupying powers, lifted sanctions on Iraq, and established the UN's role in humanitarian coordination and reconstruction efforts.[5] In doing so, it codified the coalition's authority in post-invasion Iraq. Furthermore, it signaled the Security Council's acceptance of the legal and political realities that had taken shape over the previous eight weeks. In other words, the intervention lacked lawful sanction, but operated with functional support. Therefore I will be answering the research question *Given that several UNSC members expressed strong opposition to the legitimacy of an invasion of Iraq, why did all UNSC members ultimately choose to support a resolution legitimizing it (i.e. Resolution 1483) just two months later (May 2003)?*

This stark shift in UN Security Council behavior is difficult to explain let alone fully understand. While the U.S. cited past UN resolutions 687 and 1441 to justify the invasion–arguing that Iraq was in material breach of disarmament obligations–their (the U.S.) interpretation was highly contested.[6] Most Security Council members denied the claim that these resolutions served as an authorization for unilateral military action. At most, these resolutions set the stage for the conflict. This paper argues that the members' eventual alignment around resolution 1483 was primarily the result of U.S. hegemonic pressure. However alternative explanations, such as national interest, evolving legal interpretations, and domestic political dynamics also merit consideration. To effectively analyze

[5] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1483 (2003)*, S/RES/1483, May 22, 2003, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1483(2003).

[6] *L.A. Times*, "U.S. Cites 1991 U.N. Cease-Fire Resolution as the Legal Basis for Its Invasion," March 21, 2003, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-mar-21-war-reasons21-story.html.

these competing hypotheses, I employ a qualitative research design that combines process tracing and discourse analysis. This involves a close evaluation of UNSC meeting records, relevant UNSC resolutions, public statements from key UNSC members, newspaper coverage, and secondary literature. I effectively track shifts in language, justification, and strategic alignment during the crucial time of the lead up to the resolution to understand the decision-making involved.

In doing so, this research contributes to literature on international legitimacy and complex geopolitical dynamics by highlighting the role of hegemonic influence in shaping outcomes within the Security Council. More specifically, this paper highlights how material pressure, backed by significant discursive pressure, can lead to a positive vote of support even in the aftermath of a deeply controversial war. All but 1 nation voted yes on the resolution (Syria abstained).[7] [8]Ultimately, the analysis provides valuable insight into how post hoc legitimacy is not merely granted through legal frameworks. It is often created through power driven narratives that redefine what international consensus means.

II. FROM DIVISION TO CONSENSUS: UNDERSTANDING S/RES/1483

One particularly interesting case of post-hoc legitimacy is the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 without explicit UNSC authorization. This case cannot be completely explained without understanding the broader role of legitimacy in international interventions. In international relations, legitimacy refers to the concept that an action aligns with accepted legal or normative standards,

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[7] United Nations, Security Council, "Voting System," *Security Council – United Nations*, accessed June 12, 2025, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/voting-system.

[8] United Nations Information Service Vienna, "Security Council Adopts Resolution 1483 on the Situation in Iraq," UNIS Press Release SC/7765, May 22, 2003, https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2003/sc7765.html.

making other actors more inclined to support or comply with it.[9] In a post World War II world, legitimacy is especially important in international interventions. The international community prefers multilateralism, specifically through the UN Security Council as the primary channel for the authorization of force.[10] Under the UN Charter, a resolution requires 9 affirmative votes out of 15 (with no veto from the Permanent 5 (U.S., U.K., France, China, and Russia)) to pass.[11] The UNSC's voting structure has made Council approval a necessary tool for states to legitimize military interventions. Scholars like Finnemore and Reus-Smit argue that interventions without Security Council approval usually face intensified political backlash and weak international support, whereas those with Security Council endorsement are more likely to gain normative and legal credibility.[12] In this context, legitimacy is not only a legal matter. Instead, it is a strategic asset in the politics of global governance.

In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, global tensions spiked and a lack of trust soared at an all time high among countries. Before focusing on Iraq, the U.S. launched a military intervention against Afghanistan with NATO support. This was the beginning of a two decade long war tied directly to the immediate response of 9/11. The Bush administration quickly adopted an aggressive foreign policy known as the war on terror, prioritizing preventive military action and

[9] Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999): 379–408, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2601393.

[10] Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt24hg32.

[11] United Nations, "Voting System.

[12] Christian Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), https://www.wiley.com/en-us/American%2BPower%2Band%2BWorld%2BOrder-p-x000424805.

unilateralism.[13] What began as a rhetorical campaign soon evolved into a literal war. The "War on Terror" was extended to Iraq shortly thereafter with US Intelligence claiming Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. In March 2003, the Bush administration moved forward with the invasion of Iraq without explicit United Nations Security Council Authorization.

Central to the highly contested nature of the war stood 2 key provisions within the UN Charter which are as follows:

> Article 2 (4): All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations. [14]
>
> Article 51: Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and

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[13] David E. Sanger, "Threats and Responses: The Path Ahead; A Decision Made, and Its Consequences," *New York Times*, March 17, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/17/world/threats-and-responses-the-path-ahead-a-decision-made-and-its-consequences.html.

[14] United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, art. 2(4), https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

> responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security. [15]

These two articles were especially crucial because the U.S. and U.K. governments worked to argue in the public sphere that Iraq posed a significant threat to international security, which justified preventive action being taken. Referencing prior resolutions 678 and 1441 as implicit authorization, the global superpower remained steadfast in their argument.[16]

Falk, a well known legal scholar, rejected this interpretation, asserting that preventive war was a clear violation of the Charter's writ, and manipulated the doctrine of self defense beyond reason.[17] His perspective was echoed by other scholars who also dismissed the interventions "legality". Gray asserted that the U.S. and U.K citing Resolution 678 and 1441 as justifying documentation did not replace explicit authorization from the Security Council.[18] If anything, this set a risky precedent undermining the prohibition on the use of force.[19] Franck maintains this point of view, arguing that the invasion

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[15] United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, art. 51, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

[16]Colin L. Powell, "Remarks on Iraq's Declaration," U.S. Department of State, December 19, 2002, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/16123.htm.

[17]Richard Falk, "The Iraq War and the Future of International Law," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 98 (2004): 263–66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25659933.

[18]Christine Gray, "From Unity to Polarization: International Law and the Use of Force against Iraq," *European Journal of International Law* 13, no. 1 (2002): 17-18, https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/13.1.1.

[19]*Ibid.*

marked a significant breach of the UN Charter's normative framework.[20] It also challenged whether or not the Security Council could maintain legitimacy in the face of such stark unilateral action.[21] Despite these crucial criques, the intervention moved forward without Security Council approval, prompting immediate international backlash.

The intervention was met with immediate pushback from key UNSC members, many of whom questioned the legitimacy of the U.S. and U.K. to proceed without Security Council approval.[22] A coalition of the willing (US, UK, several eastern European countries (49 countries total)) intervened in Iraq and Hussein's government was toppled in a mere 2 months.[23] However, most of the countries in the coalition did not contribute significantly. Only the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Poland did. Within the Permanent 5 members, the U.S. and U.K. were spearheading the operation whereas China, Russia, and France all opposed it. Despite this sharp division, the Security Council ultimately adopted Resolution 1483 in May 2003. This raised critical questions about how consensus was manufactured in the face of a highly contested intervention.

While extensive scholarship addresses the legal, political, and geopolitical dimensions of the conflict, far less attention has been paid to the dynamics of the Security Council during this critical, immediate post-intervention-period. More specifically, the ways in which key member states responded

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[20]Thomas M. Franck, "What Happens Now? The United Nations after Iraq," *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 3 (2003): 611, https://doi.org/10.2307/3109846.

[21]*Ibid.*

[22] *L.A. Times*, "U.S. Cites 1991 U.N. Cease-Fire Resolution.

[23] The New York Times, "The Coalition of the Willing," *The New York Times*, February 19 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/19/opinion/the-coalition-of-the-willing.html.

to U.S. dominance in the wake of the conflict. The question of how legal norms were not only reinterpreted, but also strategically leveraged or sidelined under conditions of hegemonic pressure remains underexplored.

This study aims to address the gap that exists in the literature. More specifically, It investigates how the Security Council arrived at consensus on Resolution 1483 despite initial divisions among member states. Existing literature in international law and security studies are heavily centered around the legality of the intervention and the breakdown in negotiations over a pre-war Resolution that may have authorized the use of force.

Legal scholars like Gray and Frank argue that the war directly violated the UN Charter and lacked any legal legitimacy on an international level.[24] In addition to this, scholars like Falk and Finnemore show how the U.S. approach to the intervention marked a shift from post Cold War norms about multilateralism and the use of force.[25] Although this literature provides crucial insight into the legal and political disputes preceding the invasion, there is comparatively less attention on the post invasion period. Particularly how the Security Council reached consensus on Resolution 1483 just two months later. Kumar asserts that 1483 effectively functioned as a post-hoc legitimizing instrument for

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[24] Christine Gray, "From Unity to Polarization: International Law and the Use of Force against Iraq," *European Journal of International Law* 13, no. 1 (2002): 1-21, https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/13.1.1; Thomas M. Franck, "What Happens Now? The United Nations after Iraq," *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 3 (2003): 607-620, https://doi.org/10.2307/3109846.

[25] Richard Falk, "The Iraq War and the Future of International Law," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 98 (2004): 263–66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25659933; Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt24hg32.

the intervention, but this analysis is one of few to directly confront this conflict.[26] In light of these gaps, this research investigates the complex interplay of legal, political, and diplomatic factors that contributed to this shift. Therefore, new research is needed to explain the decision-making that led to a post-hoc legitimizing of the Iraq intervention.

III. THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

H1: Hegemonic Pressure and the Logic of Neorealism

Guided by neo-realist literature, I argue that the United States employed its hegemonic position to convince fellow UNSC member states to vote in support of Resolution 1483, relying primarily on the use of material pressure(e.g. aid and military contracts as incentives). While discursive pressure (e.g. strategically framing U.S. action as necessary and legitimate) also played a role, but as reinforcing tools rather than primary drivers. . I subsequently refer to this as Hypothesis 1.

Following the Cold War, the international political landscape largely entered a unipolar phase, with the United States emerging as the most prominent global superpower. As argued by Waltz, weaker states adjust their behavior in response to the distribution of power rather than shared norms or values within an anarchic system.[27] However, Milner asserts that by treating states as unitary actors solely

[26] Rajeesh Kumar, "Iraq War 2003 and the Issue of Pre-emptive and Preventive Self-defence: Implications for the United Nations," *India Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2014): 123-137, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45072829.

[27] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1990): 29, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24357222.

responding to systemic pressure risks oversimplifying how decisions about foreign policy are made.[28] Domestic institutions, political coalitions, and internal bargaining processes can affect how a given state perceives and responds to hegemonic power.[29] Neorealism explains the structural logic, Milner's critique highlights the necessity in considering internal validation–why some states will resist or align under identical external conditions.

This interaction between structural pressure and domestic filtering became even more evident in the aftermath of 9/11 as global politics were realigned around American Security priorities. In this climate of uncertainty and insecurity, the U.S. leveraged both material and discursive power to reinforce its influence. Its actions were framed as necessary and reasonable for global order while pressuring other states to align or risk marginalization. This behavior reflects what Dunne describes as a "multilateralism of a kind," where the United States strategically invoked international institutions when convenient but circumvented them when faced with hindrances.[30] The US' strategic use of multilateralism when it fit with the state's national interest diminished the clarity between cooperation and coercion. Evidently, this environment did not foster unity; it forced adaptation among weaker states.

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[28] Helen Milner, "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique," *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 69-74, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20097244.

[29] *Ibid., 74.*

[30] Michael Dunne, "The United States, the United Nations and Iraq: 'Multilateralism of a Kind,'" *International Affairs* 79, no. 2 (2003): 259, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095820.

States seldom align with a dominant power as a result of genuine cooperation or agreement. Instead, alignment is a calculated response to structural power. Within a unipolar political landscape, weaker states may find that resistance to a hegemon is not only risky, but potentially isolating. Within the neorealist framework, Walt's theory of alliance formation can help explain how weaker states behave under hegemonic pressure. More specifically, Walt argues that weaker states often side with dominant powers not because they endorse their actions, but because resisting them is too costly.[31] I argue that this logic helps explain why several weaker states in the Security Council ultimately supported the Resolution, despite initial opposition. Their alignment should not be understood as approval, but instead a strategic calculation to avoid isolation, protect diplomatic ties, or secure material benefit under U.S. dominance. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that bandwagoning becomes more likely when states have a weak selection of potential allies and face significant threats–especially when balancing is not a viable option.[32]

Waltz adds that in an anarchic international system, survival drives state behavior, not principle.[33] Overwhelmingly, it is clear that resistance to a hegemon has proven to be futile. In this regard, shared values become secondary. What matters most is adapting to power shifts. However states do not exclusively align out of fear. Alignment can sometimes be strategic to benefit from the hegemon's dominance.

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[31] Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 22, https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540.

[32] *Ibid.,* 22-23.

[33] Waltz, *Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory*, 29.

Although Walt attributes alignment to fear, material pressure, and discursive pressure, Schweller offers a different perspective. Some states bandwagon not out of concern for security, but to pursue gain.[34] Bandwagoning can be understood as the act of siding with a dominant power. From Schweller's perspective, it becomes a strategy for gain rather than protection. I include Schweller's logic to complement Walt's logic. Schweller's perspective explains how smaller weaker states may align with a hegemon in exchange for material rewards, like contracts or diplomatic favor. In the case of Resolution 1483, support from initially reluctant states can be interpreted as a calculated move to benefit from U.S. dominance instead of submission. In this instance, Schweller's "bandwagoning for gain" reaffirms the broader theory of hegemonic pressure by showing that not all alignment was opportunistic; some of it was driven by fear of collapse in an unforgiving system.

In a neorealist international arena defined by anarchy, survival is the main concern of every state–not power. Waltz maintains that states pursue power only as a mechanism of ensuring security in a world where no higher authority offers protection.[35] For weaker states, aligning with a hegemon becomes a logical adjustment to avoid collapse or isolation. State failure is the biggest risk, not just marginalization. Walt reinforces this, adding that threat perception depends not only on capabilities, but on proximity and intent.[36] From the perspective of several member states, U.S. actions in Iraq did

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[34] Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 72–107, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539149.

[35] Waltz, *Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory*, 24.

[36] Walt, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, 39-40.

not solely appear as dominance, but as aggression. Namely, France, Germany, and Russia viewed the invasion as a unilateral overreach that bypassed necessary and legitimate international processes.[37]

Although the international system at the time of Resolution 1483 was unipolar, this did not negate its anarchic structure. Power was concentrated disproportionately in U.S. hands, but no higher authority existed to restrict it. Adjusting to the hegemon was not a matter of ideology, but one of structural necessity. As Walt posits,"bandwagoning may be adopted as a form of appeasement...to avoid an attack."[38] Structural necessity drives policy realignment, not a shift in ideology. This became increasingly clear as the United States leveraged diplomatic coercion to rally support for its post invasion agenda. I argue that states were aligning because resistance was too risky.

Mearsheimer maintains that international institutions do not constrain great powers, they reflect and extend their influence.[39] Later, Dunne characterizes U.S. behavior during the Iraq War as "multilateralism of a kind," where cooperation masked unilateral control.[40]I argue that the passage of Resolution 1483 was not a product of genuine consensus. Rather it was a consequence of material and discursive pressure applied by the U.S. in its hegemonic role. The mechanics of that coercion display how dominance and diplomacy worked hand in hand.

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[37] The New York Times, "Joint Declaration on Iraq."

[38] Walt, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, 8.

[39] John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539078.

[40] Michael Dunne, "The United States, the United Nations and Iraq: 'Multilateralism of a Kind,'" *International Affairs* 79, no. 2 (2003): 259, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095820.

Diplomatic coercion and military action are not mutually exclusive; rather, they function in tandem with diplomacy leveraged to consolidate gains acquired through force. It effectively operates through economic incentives, political pressure, and strategic dependencies to further the interests of a dominant state. Although France, Russia, and Germany initially denounced the invasion of Iraq, highlighting the illegitimate nature of the intervention, their position shifted once the conversation concerned the postwar order. How would Iraq look post war, and who would help dictate that?

In this regard, diplomatic coercion becomes a strategic tool for the United States to rally support, marginalize dissent, and manage reconstruction. I understand diplomatic coercion as a combination of both material and discursive pressure. It involved offering incentives or making threats (material), while also using specific language to shape how states view their options (discursive). As Waltz explains, structural shifts force states to model their behavior according to changes in balancing power.[41]Klare contributes to this logic, arguing that U.S. involvement in Iraq was not only rooted in security, but in access to oil and long-term regional influence as well.[42] In this instance, structural dominance and material interest come together to create space for strategic alignment. For certain states, this was an opportunity for strategic gain–what Schweller describes as "bandwagoning for profit," where weaker states hope to share the spoils of the hegemon instead of acting out of fear.[43]Aligning with the U.S. after the fact was favorable, states were offered relevance and reward.

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[41] Waltz, *Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory*, 33.

[42] Michael T. Klare, "Oil, Iraq, and American Foreign Policy: The Continuing Salience of the Carter Doctrine," *International Journal* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2006/2007): 36, https://doi.org/10.2307/40204243.

[43] Schweller, *Bandwagoning for Profit*, 92.

With key Security Council members threatening to veto any resolution legitimizing the invasion, the U.S. circumvented formal multilateralism by creating a "coalition of the willing" (US, UK, several eastern European countries (49 countries total)) .[44] The U.S. was operating unilaterally while using this maneuver to claim legitimacy. As Kane suggests, Iraq was not solely the target of invasion, it was central to the long-term agenda of American influence.[45] This framing suggests that managing post war order meant managing access to the spoils as well. The options were well defined here. Either align with the hegemon and share in reconstruction, or face exclusion from the process entirely. This is the structural dilemma created by neorealism: adjust accordingly, or lose relevance. At this stage, principle gives way to power.

Hegemonic pressure was not solely material; it was also discursive, framing how legitimacy was created. The 2002 National Security Strategy (Bush Doctrine) reimagined legitimacy by endorsing unilateral, preventive force, establishing U.S. action in Iraq as crucial to maintaining global order.[46] This rhetorical shift served to support unilateralism while effectively rendering multilateral approval unnecessary. As Cottey points out, U.S. actions post invasion reaffirm the hegemonic model. This manifested in Washington sidelining opposition, dictating post war governance, and making

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[44] The New York Times, "The Coalition of the Willing," *The New York Times*, February 19 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/19/opinion/the-coalition-of-the-willing.html.

[45] Tom Kane, "Slippery Business: Why America Attacked Iraq," *Energy & Environment* 15, no. 1 (2004): 61, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43735466.

[46] The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2002), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/.

participation contingent on cooperation.[47] In essence this environment fostered structural and rhetorical incentives for states to align accordingly–ultimately aiding in the unanimous decision to adopt Resolution 1483 under the guise of multilateral support.

If hegemonic pressure explains the shift in voting behavior, this will be clear in evidence consistent with strategic adaptation. Rhetorical shifts may be observable in initial opposition shifting into pragmatism, cooperation framed through a lens of necessity, and contradictions appearing in speeches, meetings, or memoirs. Diplomatic records, or official statements from the UN can reveal economic incentives, political trade-offs, or distress regarding exclusion from reconstruction.

I argue that support for Resolution 1483 from non U.S. and U.K. member states was not rooted in conviction, instead it was a measured response to U.S. pressure and the risk of defiance in a unipolar international landscape. I contend that these member states ultimately supported Resolution 1483 to secure diplomatic relevance, gain access to reconstruction, or avoid marginalization. From this perspective, Resolution 1483 did not provide de jure legitimacy to the invasion, but it offered de facto validation by endorsing the post-war order and acknowledging the U.S. and U.K.[48] as occupying powers. This argument theorizes that the Resolution marked a shift from contesting the war to managing the consequences, implicitly conceding to U.S. dominance.

IV. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

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[47] Andrew Cottey, "The Iraq War: The Enduring Controversies and Challenges," in *SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 81.

[48] *De Jure:* legally recognized or officially sanctioned under international law.

De Facto: existing in practice or effect, even if not formally acknowledged by law.

H2: Legal Reinterpretation and the Justification of Intervention

Beyond neo-realist perspectives, I also consider alternative theoretical explanations. Based on international legal scholarship, an alternative explanation would be that states adopted S/RES/1483 by reinterpreting existing legal norms in order to adapt to the political chaos of an illegitimate war while stopping short of endorsing the invasion itself. Subsequently, I refer to this alternative explanation as Hypothesis 2.

Although diplomatic coercion, domestic politics, and national interests offer strong explanations for the shift in UNSC voting behavior, it is necessary to consider an alternative account: states may have relied on evolving legal interpretations to account for their support of Resolution 1483. In the direct aftermath of the war, Franck identified a legal vacuum created due to the United States' disregard for Charter norms. More specifically, Franck argues that legal order ruptured as the United States openly violated Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force except in cases of self-defense or explicit Security Council authorization.[49] According to H2, the United States was engaging in sheer power politics instead of operating within legal limits.[50] This critique points out a deeper structural issue at hand. When powerful states bypass legal frameworks, it creates a power vacuum that obligates others to contest the breach or adapt accordingly.

This concern was reinforced by Corell, the UN's chief legal adviser. Corell warned in April 2003 that using force and bypassing the Security Council was setting a dangerous precedent that

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[49] Thomas M. Franck, "What Happens Now? The United Nations after Iraq," *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 3 (2003): 609, https://doi.org/10.2307/3109846.

[50] *Ibid.*, 610.

undermined the authority of international law.[51] This statement reflects the institutional anxiety that overwhelmingly existed within the UN. The core principles of the Charter were being compromised in real time. Kumar, a different legal scholar, similarly critiques the legal framing the Bush administration weaponized. Specifically, Kumar argues that the administration distorted the meaning of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter to justify an otherwise unlawful use of force. From this angle, the U.S. attempted to expand on Article 51 of the UN Charter by invoking self defense. Kumar argues that this misuse of Article 51 manipulated the distinction between preemptive and preventive force in a manner that devastated the legal boundaries established by the Charter.[52] This highlights the extent to which international law was reinterpreted to justify the invasion after the fact. In this context, the law was reactionary rather than a pillar of balance and order.

According to H2, rather than responding to diplomatic pressure or material incentives, some member states reframed their support for Resolution 1483 through a legal and institutional lens. Prior resolutions–namely 678, 687, and 1441–defined Iraq's legal standing. The U.S. and the U.K. strategically invoked these to justify their act of preventive force after the invasion. However, these arguments hold minimal merit. As Gray posits, Resolution 1441 called on the Security Council to

[51] "Impact of Sanctions, Importance of Adhering to UN Principles Debated in Context of Iraq War, as Special Charter Committee Opens Session," *UN Press Release*, United Nations, 2003, https://press.un.org/en/2003/l3031.doc.htm.

[52] Rajeesh Kumar, "Iraq War 2003 and the Issue of Pre-emptive and Preventive Self-defence: Implications for the United Nations," *India Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2014): 127, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45072829.

reconvene before any explicit use of force; it never authorized the use of unilateral force.[53] Legal precedent was eroding in practice, it was being reframed to fit a political reality. Resolution 1483, adopted unanimously two months later, did not constitute a legal endorsement of the invasion. Alternatively, as argued by Franck, the Security Council was obligated to produce a pragmatic legal response to a *fait accompli*.[54] [55] With respect to context, the law was not constraining power–it was adjusting duly. The ambiguous nature of Resolution 1483 allowed states to engage in Iraq's reconstruction while deliberately avoiding an endorsement of the invasion.

From a legal standpoint, member states were faced with the challenge of managing a post-war Iraq without endorsing the invasion itself. The situation involved not only a humanitarian or governance crisis, but a disintegration of legal legitimacy.

Without a coherent legal framework, states were forced to improvise justifications to hold together an increasingly precarious international order. This urgency was compounded as the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) Director General ElBaradei, confirmed that there was no threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction in March 2003.[56] Confronted with contested legal precedent and fragmented consensus, states were compelled to interpret international law in a manner allowing them

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[53] Christine Gray, "From Unity to Polarization: International Law and the Use of Force against Iraq," *European Journal of International Law* 13, no. 1 (2002): 16-17, https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/13.1.1.

[54] Franck, *"What Happens Now? The United Nations after Iraq,"* 615.

[55] *Fait Accompli:* A French term that translates to "accomplished fact". It refers to a completed action that cannot be undone, so others have to accept it even if they do not agree.

[56] Mohamed ElBaradei, "Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq," *International Atomic Energy Agency*, March 7, 2003, https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/status-nuclear-inspections-iraq.

to participate in post-war political negotiations about condoning the invasion's illegitimacy. These negotiations specifically concerned both the political reconstruction of Iraq and the international community's response to a largely fragile legal order. Legal advisers like Corell warned that the danger lay not only in the illegitimate nature of the war but in the precedent being set for future unilateral action. As Glennon argues, the distinction between lawful and unlawful force had crumbled by 2003; international law was no longer restricting state behavior but adapting to it.[57] In this regard, law no longer served as a check on power, but as its post hoc rationalization. They had to maneuver a damaged legal terrain where precedent was being stretched, downplayed, or ignored entirely.

If this argument is correct, I should expect to find evidence in official statements, UNSC records, and post-invasion resolutions that reflect strategic legal adaptations in place of genuine consensus.[58] Legal justifications would manifest as ambiguous and selective–citing earlier resolutions while emphasizing reconstruction and humanitarian concerns. In this situation, alignment was not only a strategic decision, but a narrative obligation.Furthermore, states will frame their support for Resolution 1483 as a procedural necessity or institutional obligation, while deliberately eluding any direct endorsement of the invasion.

On the other hand, finding evidence of clear and constant legal language endorsing the invasion would suggest this hypothesis is not supported. These findings would indicate that states

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[57] Michael J. Glennon, "Why the Security Council Failed," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2003): 24, https://doi.org/10.2307/20033576.

[58] Legal Adaptation: changes or reinterpretations of international law made to fit now political realities, often used to justify actions after they happen.

genuinely accepted the reality of the war instead of retroactively adapting to an imposed political reality.

H3: Party Politics and Internal Constraints on Foreign Policy

I hypothesize that member states supported Resolution 1483 due to domestic political pressures (elections, public opinion, and party dynamics), and that this led certain member states to support Resolution 1483. Their shifts helped shape the overall outcome of the Security Council vote. I subsequently refer to this as hypothesis 3.

Although hegemonic influence and legal adaptation offered states clear avenues to justify support for S/RES/1483, domestic politics may also help explain the shift. Before and after the invasion, leaders were compelled to deal with internal challenges–electoral risk, public backlash, and party division. Putnam's two-level game framework clarifies this behavior: international decisions need to survive domestic politics.[59] In the context of high pressure, foreign policy is oftentimes designed to preserve internal legitimacy.[60] This would help explain why states recalibrated. It was not out of support for the invasion, but out of necessity to manage the political aftermath at home.

Fearon expands on the domestic lens with the theory of audience costs. In democracies, leaders risk political punishment if they appear inconsistent or falter in professional commitment.[61] This

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[59] Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785.

[60] *Ibid.*, 432.

[61] James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994): 577-581, https://doi.org/10.2307/2944796.

makes it significantly more difficult to retract foreign policy positions once they are public, especially in a period of high tension. Milner critiques the concept that states are unitary actors and asserts that foreign policy is formed by internal bargaining among parties, institutions, and interest groups.[62] Similarly, Moravcsik emphasizes that national preferences are not the sole product of systemic pressures, but are constructed through domestic political coalitions.[63] These perspectives collectively reinforce the view that Resolution 1483 can be understood as a shift driven by domestic political constraints and as a response to international conditions.

With respect to Resolution 1483, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom each showcase how domestic political pressures influence support–whether through sustained opposition, public backlash, or internal division. France's opposition to the war was clear early on, and it was grounded in strong political consensus, particularly among the public and key government figures. Over 200,000 French citizens marched in Paris in February 2003 demanding the government veto any resolution that would authorize force.[64] This pressure coupled with elite alignment in domestic circles effectively reinforced President Chirac's legal stance at the UN. The French leadership–including Chirac, Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, and senior diplomats–presented a coherent front opposing premature use of force.

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[62] Milner, "Assumption of Anarchy," 70, 74.

[63] Andrew Moravcsik, "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 4 (1993): 481-85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1993.tb00477.x.

[64] WSWS Reporting Team, "200,000 March in Paris against Iraq War," *World Socialist Web Site*, February 17, 2003, https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/02/pari-f17.html.

In his address to the Security Council one month prior to the invasion, de Villepin outright rejected military action as unwarranted, warning that war without full inspections would underscore international legitimacy.[65] France later supporting the Resolution can be reasonably explained as an attempt to allow the government to remain diplomatically engaged without undermining its domestic position. By supporting Resolution 1483, France was not endorsing the invasion itself, but rather engaging in the post-war reconstruction effort. The ambiguous language in the Resolution gave French officials a way to frame their vote as pragmatic (addressing the realities on the ground) without undermining their earlier opposition to the war.

The H3 explanation would predict that the shift toward supporting Resolution 1483 was a reflection of domestic pressure more than genuine alignment with U.S. operations. If this is correct, it will be clear through leaders framing their support in ways that manage public opinion, party divide, or institutional dissent. The resolution will be framed as a path to reconstruction, not a retroactive endorsement of war.

Conversely, if this hypothesis is incorrect, I will expect to find consistent public support and minimal domestic dissent. I would also expect to see official statements overtly endorsing the invasion itself, rather than framing support as limited to reconstruction.

H4: Classical Realism and the Logic of Power

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[65] Dominique de Villepin, "Statement by France to Security Council," *The New York Times*, February 14, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/14/international/middleeast/statement-by-france-to-security-council.html.

Drawing on classical realist theory, I hypothesize that the UNSC members' voting behavior in support of the resolution was due to states' variation in national interests. I subsequently refer to this as hypothesis 4.

The United States' use of hegemonic power provides a strong foundation for the shift in UNSC voting behavior on S/RES/1483. Although the United States' influence overwhelmingly played a role in the postwar order, classical realism posits that states do not solely act in response to pressure. The international landscape is assessed with their own interests in mind. In this international order, power is pursued to enhance strategic position. Since power dynamics are always shifting, states must interpret the dynamic landscape and adjust accordingly.

Classical realism provides a useful lens for understanding the shift in UNSC voting behavior. Morgenthau was a key scholar in developing the theory arguing that national interest is the fundamental guide to foreign policy.[66] For clarification, this national interest must be defined in terms of power. This interest is not fixed; it changes based on the strategic environment. Michael Williams reinforces this notion, stating that states' interest is contingent on political and cultural context.[67] With this logic, states respond to the dynamic nature of the international arena in a way that maximizes strategic advantage.

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[66] Hans Morgenthau, "Realism in International Politics," *Naval War College Review* 10, no. 5 (1958): 5, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44640810.

[67] Michael C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 58, no. 4 (2004): 638, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877799.

Iraq was the perfect strategic opportunity in the aftermath of the invasion for the United States. Resolution 1483 was a chance to join reconstruction contracts, align diplomatically, and take part in energy resources. Scholars like Klare and Kane assert that oil was a central U.S. objective, and a reason for other states to look for benefit in postwar arrangements.[68] Access to Iraqi oil and production contracts offered long term economic gain. Influence over Iraqi infrastructure also created geopolitical advantages, making inclusion in reconstruction strategically favorable. Supporting this resolution allowed states to have a spot in the U.S.-led order without appearing to retroactively endorse the conflict. Krasner later explains that regimes like the UN are easily shaped by the interests of powerful states, and weaker states comply when resistance is politically risky or when alignment offers material gain.[69] According to this theory, support for Resolution 1483 was driven by calculated interest instead of principle.

Classical realism offers a coherent alternative for explaining support for Resolution 1483. From this lens, states recalibrated as a result of changing conditions and strategic interests. For some this looked like securing oil, contracts, or gaining diplomatic favor; for others, maintaining relevance in a U.S.-led order. If this hypothesis is correct, we should expect to see official statements or diplomatic records framing support in relation to opportunity and advantage–not law or shared principles. While this explanation is not tested in the results, it still remains a credible account of interest-driven behavior

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[68] Michael T. Klare, "Oil, Iraq, and American Foreign Policy: The Continuing Salience of the Carter Doctrine," *International Journal* 57, no. 1 (2001–2002): 31–34; Thomas M. Kane, "Slippery Business: The Hidden Politics of Oil," *Orbis* 47, no. 1 (2003): 111–117.

[69] Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 200, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706520.

within the UNSC. However, it will not be tested in depth as it is difficult to identify a consistent national interest across geographically and politically diverse member states.

V. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to understand why UNSC members shifted their positions on Resolution 1483. It relies on process tracing to mark significant shifts in UNSC member states' decision-making, and discourse analysis to evaluate how states justified their evolving positions.[70] These methods are reinforced by both primary sources and secondary literature, providing a sophisticated view of how and why state preferences changed. Although this research draws on discourse, it does not fully adopt an interpretivist approach. Instead of interpreting meaning subjectively, it analyzes the strategic use of language as evidence of political positioning.

To apply these methods, the project draws on a range of publicly-available discourse. These include UN Security Council resolutions, government press releases, UNSC meeting transcripts, and contemporary journalistic articles. It also considers public opinion polling data to consider the potential impact of internal political pressures, particularly in reference to domestic politics. In addition to primary sources, supplementary literature on International Relations theory and international law is employed to contextualize rhetorical choices, institutional behavior, and rhetorical positioning.

As previously mentioned, process tracing and discourse analysis have been two essential tools in this research. Discourse analysis is used to analyze the language used by state representatives,

[70] Brian David Hodges, Ayelet Kuper, and Scott Reeves, *"Qualitative Research: Discourse Analysis," BMJ: British Medical Journal* 337, no. 7669 (2008): 570–72, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20510756.

specifically as their positions on the resolution changed over time.[71] It is especially important for recognizing changes in rhetorical framing and justifications. Process tracing allows for a structured analysis of pivotal events and diplomatic exchanges. It is particularly useful for identifying key shifts that influenced how the resolution was ultimately received.

Although this research design is effective, there are key limitations that must be acknowledged. First, access to classified or internal communications is severely restricted. This makes it difficult to assess informal negotiations or fully capture the negotiations that occurred in the Security Council. Second, there is some degree of subjectivity in employing discourse analysis in the sense that one must interpret and categorize text. This limitation is mitigated by maintaining transparency in sources, applying consistent theoretical framework to preserve analytical rigor.

VI. RESULTS

A. Summary of Results and Hypothesis Evaluation

This section assesses three hypotheses to explain why the UN Security Council (UNSC) members voting behavior shifted from opposition to support of Resolution 1483 in just two months. The analysis considers diplomatic records, public opinion data, key statements, and secondary literature.

Support for each hypothesis is as follows:

- **H1: Hegemonic Pressure - strongly supported**

[71] *Ibid.*

The United States critically applied material and discursive pressure to secure alignment. This included aid, contracts, threat framing, and sidelining the UN process. This regularly overrode legal concerns and domestic pressure.

- **H2: Legal Reinterpretation - Moderately Supported**

  While states overwhelmingly viewed the invasion as illegitimate, they still accepted Resolution 1483 as a way to manage the aftermath of a post-war Iraq. The resolution reflected legal adjustment to emerging information, not endorsement of the invasion.

- **H3: Domestic Political Pressure - Partially Supported**

  Electoral dynamics, public opinion, and internal political pressures did affect some member states' decisions. However, these factors cannot explain the speed or direction of the shift alone

Overall, the evidence indicates that U.S. hegemonic pressure was the primary driver for UNSC support–not legal interpretation or domestic political pressure. The next section examines this carefully.

B. Findings From H1: Hegemonic Pressure

The first hypothesis posits that United States hegemonic pressure–both material and discursive–was the primary driving force behind the adoption of Resolution 1483. Material coercion appeared as economic incentives, diplomatic exclusion, and strategic benefits designed with alignment in mind. Discursive pressure relied on dictating the story around the war–emphasizing danger, controlling intelligence claims, and framing critics as unrealistic or uncooperative. The evidence clearly indicates that it was U.S. pressure that pushed the Security Council to support Resolution 1483.

The United States used material pressure to bolster support for Resolution 1483. This included access to postwar reconstruction efforts and economic benefit contingent upon political alignment. States supporting U.S. policy were promised contracts, aid, and debt relief. Alternatively, those that opposed U.S. efforts were excluded from diplomatic influence. The New York Times highlighted how participation in the Coalition of the Willing was linked to postwar opportunity, with the U.S. strategically leveraging its position to reward compliant states.[72]Support was not exactly grounded in agreement with U.S. action, but in the material incentives of alignment. This also gave the U.S. a way to bypass multilateral legal frameworks.

While material pressure drove the incentives for alignment, discursive pressure made it seem essential. The United States pushed this narrative that cast Iraq as irrational, uncooperative, and tied to terrorism. In a statement delivered on December 19, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell argued Iraq's noncompliance with Resolution 1441 was a serious violation, implying the U.S. would not wait for further UN action.[73] This was later reinforced when President Bush addressed the nation on March 19, 2003. He framed the invasion as a moral and security necessity, asserting that the U.S. would act with or without UN approval to "defend the peace of the world".[74]These statements created urgency

[72] The New York Times, "The Coalition of the Willing," *The New York Times*, February 19 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/19/opinion/the-coalition-of-the-willing.html.

[73] Colin L. Powell, "Remarks on Iraq's Declaration," U.S. Department of State, December 19, 2002, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/16123.htm.

[74] George W. Bush, "President Bush Addresses the Nation," *The White House*, March 19, 2003, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030319-17.html.

and redefined resistance as futile. The impact of this narrative was apparent. By mid march 2003, 66% of Americans supported going to war without another UN Vote. [75]

This rhetorical framing also used orientalist logic. As Said argues, the Middle East has often been portrayed as irrational and threatening.[76] The U.S. officially deliberately reinforced this notion by showing Iraq as lawless and in need of "freedom". The 2002 National Security Strategy held that the U.S. would act preemptively–even without solid evidence–showcasing American dominance as global responsibility.[77] These discursive tools fortified that U.S. action was inevitable and legitimate on the United States' terms.

Senior U.S. officials played a crucial role in building the case for war, and influencing international alignment. In a March 16 interview, Vice President Cheney said, "We believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons," and claimed links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda.[78] This was all proven to be false later. He was also opposed to the possibility of further diplomacy. More specifically, he asserted that "delay helps no one but Saddam Hussein," and displayed the UN as incapable of

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[75] ABC News/Washington Post, *ABC News/Washington Post Poll: 48-Hour Deadline for Iraq*, Question 6, USABCWP.031803.R04, TNS Intersearch (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 2003), https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31086893.

[76] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 163, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41397448.

[77] The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2002), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/.

[78] Dick Cheney, *"Interview with Vice President Dick Cheney on NBC's Meet the Press,"* interview by Tim Russert, NBC News, March 16, 2003, https://www.leadingtowar.com/PDFsources_claims_noweapons2/2003_03_16_NBCmtp.pdf.

addressing the threat.[79] Another key figure, Paul Wolfowitz, acting Deputy Secretary of Defense went on to explain how the administration settled on WMDs as a core justification of the war. He admitted they were deliberately chosen "for bureaucratic reasons," since it was the one rationale "everyone could agree on."[80] His admission implies that the justification for declaring war was not rooted in evidence, but by rhetorical framing designed to unify support domestically and internationally.

Secretary of States Colin Powell became a key U.S. representative in the face of the UN. His presentation was viewed on a large scale–77% of Americans watched it live[81]–he later recounted it as a "blot" on his record and asserted that it was "devastating" to learn that intelligence used in the speech lied in false pretenses.[82] The Chilcot Report confirmed that the case for weapons of mass destruction was cast "with a certainty that was not justified,".[83] In this regard, narrative control was more important than accurate information. These statements and admissions reveal the role of top officials in manufacturing urgency and legitimacy, even without reliable evidence.

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[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Kevin Drum, *"Paul Wolfowitz and Vanity Fair," Washington Monthly*, May 31, 2003, https://washingtonmonthly.com/2003/05/31/paul-wolfowitz-and-vanity-fair/.

[81] Newsweek, PSRA/Newsweek Poll #2003-NW03: *Iraq After Colin Powell's Presentation*, Question 16, USPSRNEW.020803.R11, Princeton Survey Research Associates (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 2003), https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31096792.

[82] Steven R. Weisman, *"Powell Calls His U.N. Speech a Lasting Blot on His Record," New York Times*, September 9, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/09/politics/powell-calls-his-un-speech-a-lasting-blot-on-his-record.html.

[83] The Iraq Inquiry, *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary* (London: Stationery Office, 2016), 4.

Despite the deliberate rhetoric from key U.S. officials, public skepticism overwhelmingly existed in many member states. A clear gap between government decisions and public opinion under hegemonic pressure can be identified here. Although there was significant public opposition to the war in several member states, Resolution 1483 was still adopted. Polling data reiterates this disconnect: about a third (36%) of Americans believed that the Bush Administration deliberately misled the public about weapons of mass destruction in late may 2003.[84] In Spain, public opposition to the war consumed almost the entire country with 91% opposed in a poll at that time, yet the government remained steadfast in its coalition membership and supported post-invasion efforts.[85] [86] The United Kingdom was faced with a similar feat. Widespread anti-war sentiment swept across the nation and this was evident through protest, yet Prime Minister Tony Balir firmly backed the invasion.[87] These cases demonstrate how domestic political pressures were often trumped by external hegemonic influence. This is what Cottey describes as "selective multilateralism," where states engage international institutions out of convenience or pressure.[88]Legal interpretations and domestic pressure do play a role

[84] Newsweek, PSRA/Newsweek Poll #2003-NW08: *Fetal Rights*, Question 14, USPSRNEW.053103.R04A, Princeton Survey Research Associates (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 2003), https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31096797.

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] Miguel González, "Aznar and Blair Agreed on Joint Iraq War Communications Strategy," *El País*, July 7, 2016, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/07/07/inenglish/1467879224_196507.html.

[87] Iraq Inquiry, *Executive Summary*, 17.

[88] Andrew Cottey, "The Iraq War: The Enduring Controversies and Challenges," in *SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74.

in shaping state behavior; they were often subordinated to the overwhelming influence of U.S. hegemonic power.

This evidence strongly supports the notion that U.S. hegemonic pressure was the primary source behind UNSC support for Resolution 1483. Waltz's structural realism displays how weaker states had little choice but to align with U.S. demands to maneuver risk, especially in a unipolar system. Mearsheimer offers clarity regarding how the U.S. used the Security Council as a tool to advance their own interest instead of a forum for consensus. Schweller's concept of "bandwagoning for gain," explains that states sought material incentives or political gain despite any anxieties they held. Finally, Said's Orientalism shows how U.S. discourse casts Iraq as an irrational and imminent threat, justifying extreme measures. In sum, material and discursive pressure–not shared conviction–was the decisive factor in the Council's shift. The following section considers the role of legal reinterpretation and domestic political pressures in shaping what led to the unanimous passage of Resolution 1483. While these were still relevant, their role comes second in shaping outcomes.

C. Findings From H2: Legal Reinterpretation

Another possible explanation for the shift in Security Council voting behavior was that states reassessed the invasion through a legal lens. Through this perspective, Resolution 1483 did not represent coercion or opportunism, but an evolving interpretation of existing legal frameworks instead. Leading up to the invasion key member states–namely France, Russia, and Germany–firmly disagreed with the use of force without Security Council approval.[89]This was argued on the grounds that

[89] The New York Times, "Joint Declaration on Iraq," March 5, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/joint-declaration-on-iraq.html.

peaceful disarmament can still be achieved and that UN inspections were working.[90] Their position aligned with Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter which prohibits the use of force against a state's sovereignty.[91]These stark objections were rooted in a shared legal concern that unilateral war was a clear violation of core Charter principles.

Despite overwhelming objections, the U.S. and the U.K. remained resolute that existing resolutions–particularly 678, 687, and 1441–provided sufficient legal backing for the invasion. They argued that Iraq was in material breach according to Resolution 687, and this should allow them to impose unilateral force.[92] This interpretation was met with pushback on a large scale. Legal scholars including Gray and Kumar argue that these claims stretched precedent and disregarded the need for a new mandate.[93] [94]The U.S. sidestepped collective approval by misconstruing original resolutions beyond their intended scope. UN Legal adviser Corell reinforced this in an April 2003 briefing,

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[90] *Ibid.*

[91] United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, art. 2(4), https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

[92] *L.A. Times*, "U.S. Cites 1991 U.N. Cease-Fire Resolution as the Legal Basis for Its Invasion," March 21, 2003, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-mar-21-war-reasons21-story.html.

[93] Christine Gray, "From Unity to Polarization: International Law and the Use of Force against Iraq," *European Journal of International Law* 13, no. 1 (2002): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/13.1.1.

[94] Rajeesh Kumar, "Iraq War 2003 and the Issue of Pre-emptive and Preventive Self-defence: Implications for the United Nations," *India Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2014): 131–134, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45072829.

warning that the use of military sanctions against Iraq without Security Council approval set a dangerous precedent.[95] The U.S. approach relied on ambiguity to justify a decision they already made.

In the aftermath of the invasion, the Security Council was forced to deal with a legal dilemma. The war continued without explicit UNSC authorization, but the situation demanded international management. As legal scholar Franck posits, Resolution 1483 did not endorse the war–it was a calculated response to a geopolitical fait accompli.[96] The resolution aimed to stabilize a new reality, not how it came to be. This difference was reiterated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who later said that the war "was not in conformity with the UN Charter" and was therefore "illegal".[97] Annan also held that preventive war undermined the collective security framework of the UNSC and exposed dangerous fragmentation of international law. This was exacerbated by the fact that it happened without Security Council approval. While Resolution 1483 allowed for international cooperation, it did not absolve the war's legal illegitimacy.

Serious legal doubts remained, even after the resolution's passage. The IAEA found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, directly undercutting the claim that Iraq was an imminent threat.[98]This directly challenged the reasoning that the war was necessary under international law. In

[95] "Impact of Sanctions, Importance of Adhering to UN Principles Debated in Context of Iraq War, as Special Charter Committee Opens Session," *UN Press Release*, United Nations, 2003, https://press.un.org/en/2003/l3031.doc.htm.

[96] Thomas M. Franck, "What Happens Now? The United Nations after Iraq," *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 3 (2003): 615, https://doi.org/10.2307/3109846.

[97] UN News, "Lessons of Iraq war underscore importance of UN Charter – Annan," *UN News*, September 16, 2004, https://news.un.org/en/story/2004/09/115352.

[98] Mohamed ElBaradei, "Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq," *International Atomic Energy Agency*, March 7, 2003, https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/status-nuclear-inspections-iraq.

addition to this, legal critiques continued from within the UN itself. This reflects a broader view that Resolution 1483 was not a legal endorsement, but a reluctant response to what was already occurring.

In essence, legal reinterpretation played a part in shaping the discourse around 1483, but it was by no means the primary factor behind the Council's shift. Instead of establishing the Security Council in legal principle, international law operated as a post hoc tool to rationalize a response to geopolitical realities. There was pressure to establish a framework that could reassert some degree of legal order, even if minimal. The credibility of the Security Council was strained in a unipolar system, and without action, it risked further damage. This was never about reinforcing Charter norms, but about preserving the Council's relevance.The law was a means to manage legitimacy, not define it. The following section considers an alternative explanation: if domestic pressures influenced the position of a given member state.

D. Findings From H3: Domestic Political Pressure

Another explanation considers domestic political pressure as a possible explanation for the shift in Security Council behavior. Leaders may have supported Resolution 1483 to handle internal dissent, preserve party unity, or respond to public opinion.[99] In the "two-level games" model explained by Putnam, the scholar explains that international decisions reflect both domestic and external constraints.[100] However in this specific situation, domestic politics shape how support was presented, not why it was given. As such, it operated as a secondary influence at most.

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[99] Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–460, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785.

[100] *Ibid.*

Studying specific cases confirms that domestic politics affected the Council's decisions minimally, if at all. In the U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair faced public backlash over the invasion but ultimately supported Resolution 1483. He asserted that it was a necessary step to rebuild Iraq. Similarly in Spain José María Aznar backed the U.S. even when there were massive protests.[101] Alliance took precedence over public opinion in the Spanish case. Conversely, France continued to oppose the invasion–but this was more than likely due to the fact that opposing the U.S. was politically crucial. Across all three cases, domestic factors explain how leaders justified their position, but not how they actually voted.

Alternatively, Spain and the United Kingdom both supported the invasion beginning, but did so while grappling with intense domestic resistance. In Spain, Prime Minister José María Aznar moved forward despite explicit legal warnings and overwhelming public opposition.[102] He tried to secure international legitimacy by advocating for a second resolution and pressuring other members, but failed to do so.[103] Without question, the nation pivoted. Resolution 1483 was a tool to adjust the narrative from illegitimate to necessary post-war involvement.

Similarly, the U.K. followed a corresponding path. Prime Minister Tony Blair was harshly met with mass protest, key resignations, and something of a full-scale rebellion within his own party. Robin Cook's resignation speech directly addressed the unjust grounds on which the war was waged–and 217

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[101]Miguel González, "Aznar and Blair Agreed on Joint Iraq War Communications Strategy," *El País*, July 7, 2016, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/07/07/inenglish/1467879224_196507.html.

[102] *Ibid.*

[103] *Ibid.*

MPs–83 from Labour–voted against the intervention.[104] Blair's response mentioned moral appeal and strategic framing, but nonetheless domestic trust was weak. Like Aznar, he attempted to use Resolution 1483 as a means of reframing the conflict, asserting the U.K.'s role as one of reconstruction and international responsibility. It is evident in both cases that alignment was not so much about alignment with U.S. strategy, but rather about salvaging political legitimacy in a tough context.

Ultimately, domestic politics framed the optics of state behavior more than the actual decision-making. Compared to hegemonic influence and legal discourse, its influence was minute. The following section analyzes which explanation best accounts for the shift in UNSC voting behavior.

E. Discussion

This section evaluates the three explanations tested in the results section to determine which best explains the Security Council's shift on Resolution 1483. The central puzzle is clear: why did all UNSC members ultimately choose to support Resolution 1483–effectively legitimizing it– despite strong initial opposition? By comparatively assessing the strength of hegemonic pressure, legal reinterpretation, and domestic political influence, this section identifies what exactly drives the shift we observe.

Hegemonic pressure appears to be the explanation that carries the most merit. In the direct aftermath of the invasion, material incentives and discursive framing were strategically used to shift state behavior by the United States. States that decided to ultimately align did so because reisting U.S.

[104] Robin Cook, "House of Commons Hansard Debates for 17 Mar 2003 (pt 33)," *UK Parliament*, March 17, 2003, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030317/debtext/30317-33.htm; The Guardian, "Parliament Gives Blair Go-Ahead for War," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/18/iraq.iraq6.

dominance was risky - even when they had previously opposed the intervention. It is unlikely that their legal or political views changed substantially. Rather the shift represented external adaptation, not internal conviction. States adjusted their behavior to maintain strategic standing without reversing their prior principles. Legal reinterpretation provided post hoc justification rather than initiating the change in position. While domestic political pressures were undoubtedly present, they held minimal explanatory power outside of surface-level framing. In sum, the findings point to hegemonic power as the most appropriate explanation for the shift in states' positions at the UN Security Council.

While all three explanations were present, their influence was disproportionate. Legal and domestic factors gave states a way to frame their decisions. However, they ultimately operated an international arena shaped by U.S. dominance. Hegemonic pressure made resistance risky and alignment strategic. Therefore, Resolution 1483 reflected compliance not consensus.

VII. CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explain why the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1483 in May 2003, despite strong opposition just two months earlier. Three competing explanations were tested through qualitative analysis of legal arguments, voting behavior, and institutional dynamics: hegemonic pressure, legal reinterpretation, and domestic political influence.

The evidence overwhelmingly supports hegemonic pressure as the leading hypothesis. The United States exerted material and discursive pressure to drive the Security Council toward alignment. However it is necessary to highlight that material pressure played a more decisive role in driving the Security Council toward alignment. The legal argument allowed states to retroactively rationalize their

decisions, while domestic pressure affected how support was framed–not why it was given. The Council's shift can be explained as a calculated adaptation to U.S. dominance in a unipolar system.

Resolution 1483 marked the point at which the international system aligned to a new geopolitical reality. This case reveals the limited nature of institutional constraint when power is imposed unilaterally. It also raises broader questions about whether multilateral institutions can handle the influence of dominant powers in moments of crisis.

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