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## Representation Of The Conflict In Iraq In “The Hurt Locker”

“The Hurt Locker” (2008), directed by Kathryn Bigelow, is one of the most critically-acclaimed films about the Iraq War. This 6-time Oscar winning movie follows a team of American military EOD’s (explosive ordnance disposal technicians) as they wage a seemingly endless war against the improvised explosive devices of the insurgents. This conflict began in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq by a United States-led coalition that overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein, and ended in 2011 following a decline in violence and a gradual reduction of the American military presence. This film is praised for its accurate portrayal of the conflict in Iraq, and although it does align with several scholarly characteristics of modern conflict, such as the “conflict trap” and warm climates, there are a few points where it diverges. In his novel “The Bottom Billion”, Paul Collier outlines four “traps” that countries can fall into which perpetuate their poverty and put them at a higher risk for conflict.

In “The Hurt Locker”, a characteristic that falls in line with contemporary conflict is the “conflict trap”. Sometimes considered the most dangerous of the four “traps”, it involves a repeated pattern of violence and war (civil war and war with other nations).

The film is set in Iraq, a state that has no shortage of violence and conflict in its history. Dating back as early as 1917, Iraq has been through occupation, civil war, international war, national revolts, coups d’état and wars with other countries. These continual crises leave behind a society that perpetually suffers their consequences, and primes conditions for future conflict. Examples of such conditions include an improved organizational capacity for warfare, weakened political institutions, and economic destabilization. According to Collier, the structural feature of a nation’s violent history, can not only be a strong predictor of future conflict, but imply a cycle of perpetual conflict and violence. Another characteristic of conflict seen in the film, as outlined by scholars, is in regards to climate. According to a study by Solomon et al., “deviations from mild temperatures systematically increases the risk of conflict, often substantially”. The results of the study found that warmer temperatures increased the frequency of violence and conflict by up to 14%. In each of the 27 societies studied, conflict responded most consistently to temperature, highlighting the positive relationship between high temperatures and an increase in violence.

“The Hurt Locker” is set Iraq, a country in the Middle East that has a mostly desert climate, where temperatures can reach up to a high of 44°C. This structural feature of contemporary conflict falls in line with the correlation between high temperatures and conflict. However, there are certain characteristics of the film that are not in line with the central features of contemporary conflict. One of such characteristics is that Iraq is not landlocked. Collier states

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that one of the factors that puts a nation at a very high risk of civil war and conflict is if it is landlocked, and if it has so-called “bad neighbors”. That is, if a landlocked country borders countries that have poor transport routes, the transportation costs to and from the sea for the landlocked nation depend solely on the quality and cost of the infrastructure in their neighboring country. In a way, they are victim to their bordering neighbors. In the case of conflict in Iraq, this characteristic is not a factor that increased its risk of conflict. Iraq is not a landlocked nation - the southern part of the country is the northern coastline of the Persian Gulf. Although it isn't much, the nation still enjoys this territorial sea, with most of its transportation going through the Port of Umm Qasr. Thus, the nation does not uniquely rely on its neighboring countries for transportation.

Lastly, there is one other structural characteristic that does not quite fit within the parameters set out by Collier. He says that that one of the major features that heightens the risk of conflict in a country is if it is mountainous, as this terrain “provides an obvious safe haven for rebel forces and it increases military feasibility” (Collier et al, 2009). Although in reality, Iraq is a nation known for its mountainous terrain in the north and the west, the film did not portray this characteristic at all. The conflict in the movie was mostly found in urban areas (such as city streets) and in desert plains. Not once was the audience shown any kind of mountainous area, as the director chose to ignore this key structural feature that was a reality of the country's increased chances of conflict.

Overall, I do believe that director Kathryn Bigelow created an accurate representation of the conflict in Iraq. Although there were a few discrepancies between scholars' characteristics of contemporary conflict (e.g. Collier's structural feasibility features of mountainous terrain and landlocked countries) and the reality of the situation in Iraq, there is an overwhelming number of characteristics that did align. Among them, the “conflict trap” and warm climate found in Iraq put the country at a heightened risk of conflict, and are highlighted in the film.

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