

The War in Iraq: A Justified War?

Document 1

Speech by President George W. Bush

On March 17, 2003, President George W. Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Following is an excerpt of the speech Bush made explaining the ultimatum.

For more than a decade, the United States and other nations have pursued patient and honorable efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime without war. That regime pledged to reveal and destroy all its weapons of mass destruction as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf war in 1991....Peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again because we are not dealing with peaceful men. Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised....

The danger is clear. Using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country or any other....For the last four and a half months, the United States and our allies have worked within the Security Council to enforce that council's longstanding demands. Yet some permanent members of the (United Nations) Security Council have publicly announced that they will veto any resolution that compels the disarmament of Iraq. These governments share our assessment of the danger, but not our resolve to meet it....The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours....

Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing... Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast. And I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror. And we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free....

The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed. Our government is on heightened watch against these dangers. Just as we are preparing to ensure victory in Iraq, we are taking further actions to protect our homeland....

The cause of peace requires all free nations to recognize new and undeniable realities. In the 20th century some chose to appease murderous dictators whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war. In this century when

evil men plot chemical, biological and nuclear terror, a policy of appeasement could bring destruction of a kind never before seen on this earth. Terrorists and terrorist states do not reveal these threats with fair notice in formal declarations. And responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense, it is suicide. The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now....

Unlike Saddam Hussein, we believe the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty. And when the dictator has departed, they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation....The power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land. And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace. That is the future we choose. Free nations have a duty to defend our people by uniting against the violent. And tonight, as we have done before, America and our allies accept that responsibility.

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Speech by Senator Robert Byrd

On March 19, 2003, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia delivered a speech on the floor of the U.S. Senate that opposed the march to war.

I have watched the events of recent months with a heavy, heavy heart. No more is the image of America one of strong, yet benevolent peacekeeper. The image of America has changed. Around the globe, our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned.

Instead of reasoning with those with whom we disagree, we demand obedience or threaten recrimination. Instead of isolating Saddam Hussein, we seem to have isolated ourselves. We proclaim a new doctrine of preemption (acting before we are attacked) which is understood by few and feared by many. We say that the United States has the right to turn its firepower on any corner of the globe which might be suspect in the war on terrorism. We assert that right without the sanction of any international body. As a result, the world has become a much more dangerous place. We flaunt our superpower status with arrogance. We treat UN Security Council members like ingrates who offend our princely dignity by lifting their heads from the carpet. Valuable alliances are split.

The case this Administration tries to make to justify its fixation with war is tainted by charges of falsified documents and circumstantial evidence. We cannot convince the world of the necessity of this war for one simple reason. This is a war of choice.

There is no credible information to connect Saddam Hussein to 9/11. The twin towers fell because a world-wide terrorist group, Al Qaeda, with cells in over 60 nations, struck at our wealth and our influence by turning our own planes into missiles, one of which would likely have slammed into the dome of this beautiful Capitol except for the brave sacrifice of the passengers on board

But, this Administration has directed all of the anger, fear, and grief which emerged from the ashes of the twin towers and the twisted metal of the Pentagon towards a tangible villain, one we can see and hate and attack. And villain he is. But, he is the wrong villain. And this is the wrong war.... The general unease surrounding this war is not just due to "orange alert." There is a pervasive sense of rush and risk and too many questions unanswered. How long will we be in Iraq? What will be the cost? What is the ultimate mission? How great is the danger at home?

What is happening to this country? When did we become a nation which ignores and berates our friends? When did we decide to risk undermining international order by adopting a radical and doctrinaire approach to using our awesome

military might? How can we abandon diplomatic efforts when the turmoil in the world cries out for diplomacy?

Why can this President not seem to see that America's true power lies not in its will to intimidate, but in its ability to inspire?

Document 3

Speech by Senator McCain

Senator John McCain (2008 Republican Presidential Candidate) gave this speech in response to Senator Byrd's speech. Senator McCain fought, was wounded, and was help captive as a Prisoner of War in Vietnam.

I observed the comments of the distinguished Senator from West Virginia concerning the events which are about to transpire within the next hour or so, or days. I did not really look forward to coming to the floor and debating the issue. It has been debated. It has been discussed in the media. It has been discussed at every kitchen table in America. But I felt it would be important for me to respond to allegations concerning the United States of America, its status in the world, and, in particular, what happens after this conflict is over, which I do not think we have paid enough attention to, perhaps understandably, because our first and foremost consideration is the welfare of the young men and women we are sending in harm's way. But to allege that somehow the United States of America has demeaned itself or tarnished its reputation by being involved in liberating the people of Iraq, to me, simply is neither factual nor fair.

The United States of America has involved itself in the effort to disarm Saddam Hussein, and now freedom for the Iraqi people, with the same principles that motivated the United States of America in most of the conflicts we have been involved in, most recently Kosovo and Bosnia, and in which, in both of those cases, the United States national security was not at risk, but what was at risk was our advocacy and willingness to serve and sacrifice on behalf of people who are the victims of oppression and genocide.

We did not go into Bosnia because Mr. Milosevic had weapons of mass destruction. We did not go into Kosovo because ethnic Albanians or others were somehow a threat to the security of the United States. We entered into those conflicts because we could not stand by and watch innocent men, women, and children being slaughtered, raped, and "ethnically cleansed." We found a new phrase for our lexicon: "ethnic cleansing." Ethnic cleansing is a phrase which has incredible implications.

The mission our military is about to embark on is fraught with danger, and it means the loss of brave young American lives. But I also believe it offers the opportunity for a new day for the Iraqi people.

Madam President, there is one thing I am sure of, that we will find the Iraqi people have been the victims of an incredible level of brutalization, terror, murder, and every other kind of disgraceful and distasteful oppression on the part of Saddam Hussein's regime. And contrary to the assertion of the Senator from West Virginia, when the people of Iraq are liberated, we will again have written another chapter in the glorious history of the United States of America, that we will fight for the freedom of other citizens of the world, and we again assert the most glorious phrase, in my view, ever written in the English language; and that is: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The people of Iraq , for the first time, will be able to realize those inalienable rights. I am proud of the United States of America. I am proud of the leadership of the [President of the United States](#).

It is not an easy decision to send America's young men and women into harm's way. As I said before, some of them will not be returning. But to somehow assert, as some do, that the people of Iraq and the Middle East are not entitled to those same God-given rights that Americans and people all over the country are, that they do not have those same hopes and dreams and aspirations our own citizens do, to me, is a degree of condescension. I might even use stronger language than that to describe it.

So I respectfully disagree with the remarks of the Senator from West Virginia. I believe the President of the United States has done everything necessary and has exercised every option short of war, which has led us to the point we are today...

So perhaps the [Senator from West Virginia](#) is right. I do not think so. Events will prove one of us correct in the next few days. But I rely on history as my guide to the future, and history shows us, unequivocally, that this nation has stood for freedom and democracy, even at the risk and loss of American lives, so that all might enjoy the same privileges or have the opportunity to someday enjoy the same privileges as we do in this noble experiment called the United States of America.

Document 4

Excerpt from the White House report to Congress on its reasons for war on Iraq

"Iraq both poses a continuing threat to the national security of the United States and international peace and security in the Persian Gulf region and remains in material and unacceptable breach of its international obligations by, among other things, continuing to possess and develop a significant chemical and biological weapons capability, actively seeking a nuclear weapons capability, and supporting and harboring terrorist organizations....

Further delay in taking action against Iraq will only serve to give Saddam Hussein's regime additional time to further develop weapons of mass destruction to use against the United States, its citizens, and its allies. The United States and the UN have long demanded immediate, active, and unconditional cooperation by Iraq in the disarmament of its weapons of mass destruction. There is no reason to believe that Iraq will disarm and cooperate with inspections to verify such disarmament, if the U.S. and the UN employ only diplomacy and other peaceful means....

The use of force against Iraq will directly advance the war on terror, and will be consistent with continuing efforts against international terrorists residing and operating elsewhere in the world....

In the circumstances described above, the President of the United States has the authority—indeed, given the dangers involved, the duty—to use force against Iraq to protect the security of the American people and to compel compliance with Security Council resolutions."

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Senator Barack Obama: October 2, 2002

Before he was president, Barack Obama gave a speech at a rally in Chicago opposing the war in Iraq. He would later use his opposition to the war as a major point in his campaign for the Presidency.

Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances. The Civil War was one of the bloodiest in history, and yet it was only through the crucible of the sword, the sacrifice of multitudes, that we could begin to perfect this union, and drive the scourge of slavery from our soil. I don't oppose all wars.

My grandfather signed up for a war the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed, fought in Patton's army. He saw the dead and dying across the fields of Europe; he heard the stories of fellow troops who first entered Auschwitz and Treblinka. He fought in the name of a larger freedom, part of that arsenal of democracy that triumphed over evil, and he did not fight in vain. I don't oppose all wars.

After Sept. 11, after witnessing the carnage and destruction, the dust and the tears, I supported this administration's pledge to hunt down and root out those who would slaughter innocents in the name of intolerance, and I would willingly take up arms myself to prevent such tragedy from happening again. I don't oppose all wars. And I know that in this crowd today, there is no shortage of patriots, or of patriotism.

What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war...A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics. Now let me be clear — I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power. He has repeatedly defied UN resolutions, thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, and coveted nuclear capacity. He's a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him.

But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States or to his neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that in concert with the international community he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history. I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaida. I am not opposed to all wars. I'm opposed to dumb wars.

So for those of us who seek a more just and secure world for our children, let us send a clear message to the president today. You want a fight, President Bush? Let's finish the fight with bin Laden and al-Qaida, through effective, coordinated intelligence, and a shutting down of the financial networks that support terrorism, and a homeland security program that involves more than color-coded warnings. You want a fight, President Bush?

Let's fight to make sure that the U.N. inspectors can do their work, and that we vigorously enforce a non-proliferation treaty, and that former enemies and current allies like Russia safeguard and ultimately eliminate their stores of nuclear material, and that nations like Pakistan and India never use the terrible weapons already in their possession, and that the arms merchants in our own country stop feeding the countless wars that rage across the globe. You want a fight, President Bush?

Let's fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East, the Saudis and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their own people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corruption and inequality, and mismanaging their economies so that their youth grow up without education, without prospects, without hope, the ready recruits of terrorist cells. You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to wean ourselves off Middle East oil, through an energy policy that doesn't simply serve the interests of Exxon and Mobil.

Those are the battles that we need to fight. Those are the battles that we willingly join. The battles against ignorance and intolerance. Corruption and greed. Poverty and despair. The consequences of war are dire, the sacrifices immeasurable. We may have occasion in our lifetime to once again rise up in defense of our freedom, and pay the wages of war. But we ought not — we will not — travel down that hellish path blindly. Nor should we allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain.