



Changing Rationales

An Anthology of Bush Administration Quotes on Iraq

Bryan Thomas and Rudy deLeon
May 2008

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April 15, 1994—Former Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney

Question: “Do you think that U.S. or UN forces should have moved into Baghdad?”

Cheney: “No. Because if we’d gone to Baghdad we would have been all alone, there wouldn’t have been anyone else with us. It would have been a U.S. occupation of Iraq. None of the Arab forces that were willing to fight with us in Kuwait were willing to invade Iraq. Once you got to Iraq and took it over, took down Saddam Hussein’s government, then what are you going to put in its place? That’s a very volatile part of the world, and if you take down the central government of Iraq, you can easily end up seeing pieces of Iraq fly off, part of it—the Syrians would like to have to the west, part of eastern Iraq the Iranians would like to claim, they fought over it for eight years. In the north you’ve got the Kurds, and if the Kurds spin loose and join with the Kurds in Turkey, then you threaten the territorial integrity of Turkey. It’s a quagmire if you go that far and try to take over Iraq. The other thing was casualties. Everyone was impressed with the fact we were able to do our job with as few casualties as we had. But for the 146 Americans killed in action, and for their families, it wasn’t a cheap war. And the question for the president, in terms of whether or not we went on to Baghdad, took additional casualties in an effort to get Saddam Hussein, was how many additional dead Americans is Saddam worth? And our judgment was, not very many, and I think we got it right.”¹

1999—George H. W. Bush, and Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, “A World Transformed”

Former President George H. W. Bush: “I firmly believed that we should not march into Baghdad. Our stated mission, as codified in UN resolution, was a simple one—end the aggression, knock Iraq’s forces out of Kuwait, and restore Kuwait’s leaders. To occupy Iraq would instantly shatter our coalition, turning the whole Arab world against us, and make a broken tyrant into a latter-day Arab hero. It would have taken us way beyond the imprimatur of international law bestowed by the resolutions of the Security Council, assigning young soldiers to a fruitless hunt for a securely entrenched dictator and condemning them to fight in what would be an unwinnable urban guerrilla war. It could only plunge that part of the world into even greater instability and destroy the credibility we were working so hard to reestablish.

Former President George H.W. Bush and Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor 1989–1993: “Trying to eliminate Saddam, extending the ground war into an occupation of Iraq, would have violated our guideline about not changing objectives in midstream, engaging in ‘mission creep,’ and would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. Apprehending him was probably impossible ... We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. The coalition would instantly have collapsed, the Arabs deserting it in anger and other allies pulling out as well. Under the circumstances, there was no viable ‘exit strategy’ we could see, violating another of our principles ... Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been a dramatically different—and perhaps barren—outcome.”²

We provide this anthology as a reference for debate on the current war in Iraq. After five years of combat and the expenditure of considerable American treasure, particularly the lives of her sons and daughters, it is an important exercise to recount the words and pledges that were offered during the origins of the current conflict.

A grateful American people acknowledge the service and sacrifice of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States, their spouses, children, and parents. They have served, and are serving with great distinction. To these soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen and coast guardsmen, their fellow Americans acknowledge with much appreciation the tremendous burden they have carried.

Looking back at these words, we do not challenge the intent or integrity of those we quote. But the references remind us that no responsibility is greater than the decision to take a country to war. That commitment must be rooted not in easy politics and a promise of a quick mission accomplished, but instead in hard, shared sacrifice and awareness of the path ahead. This is our American challenge as we seek a new direction and an end to the war in Iraq.

The text is organized in four sections.

- I. Reasons for War
- II. Planning and Execution
- III. Cost of War
- IV. Defining Victory

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I. Reasons for War

Early Calls for War

January 26, 1998—Letter from PNAC to President Clinton³

Neoconservative group sends letter to President Clinton calling for regime change in Iraq. The group included Elliott Abrams, Richard L. Armitage, William F. Bennett, Jeffrey Bergner, John Bolton, Paula Dobriansky, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, William Kristol, Richard Perle, Peter W. Rodman, Donald Rumsfeld, William Schneider, Jr., Vin Weber, Paul Wolfowitz, R. James Woolsey and Robert B. Zoellick.

“... if Saddam does acquire the capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction, as he is almost certain to do if we continue along the present course, the safety of American troops in the region, or our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world’s supply of oil will all be put at hazard.”

[[Project for the New American Century](#)]

“In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.”

[[Project for the New American Century](#)]

“We urge you to articulate this aim, and to turn your Administration’s attention to implementing a strategy for removing Saddam’s regime from power.” [[Project for the New American Century](#)]

January 29, 2002—President Bush delivers State of the Union Address⁴

In a famous and foreshadowing passage, President Bush says Iraq is part of “axis of evil”.

“Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens—leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections—then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.” [[State of the Union](#)]

“States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.”

[[State of the Union](#)]

Weapons of Mass Destruction, Regime Change and Liberation

August 26, 2002—Vice President Cheney Speaks at Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention⁵

Vice President Cheney says Americans will liberate Iraqis and eliminate Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.

“There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. And there is no doubt that his aggressive regional ambitions will lead him into future confrontations with his neighbors—confrontations that will involve both the weapons he has today, and the ones he will continue to develop with his oil wealth.” [[White House](#)]

“After liberation, the streets in Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy.” [[White House](#)]

September 18, 2002—Former President George H. W. Bush on CNN⁶

Former President Bush reveals his hatred of Saddam Hussein.

“I hate Saddam Hussein. I don’t hate a lot of people. I don’t hate easily, but I think he’s, as I say, his word is no good and he’s brute. He’s used poison gas on his own people. So there’s nothing redeeming about this man.” [[CNN](#)]

“I have nothing but hatred in my heart for him. But he’s got a lot of problems, but immortality isn’t one of them.” [[CNN](#)]

September 27, 2002—Secretary Rumsfeld Press Conference⁷

Secretary Rumsfeld says Hussein’s mobile WMD facilities pose a threat.

“His facilities are mobile; they have been widely dispersed to a number of locations; (he has) vast underground networks and facilities, and sophisticated denial and deception techniques. In addition, (weapons and military facilities) have been placed in close proximity to hospitals, schools and mosques.” [[Department of Defense](#)]

October 7, 2002—President Bush Delivers Speech on Iraq in Cincinnati⁸

President Bush threatens that the final proof of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs "could come in the form of a mushroom cloud".

"Members of the Congress of both political parties, and members of the United Nations Security Council, agree that Saddam Hussein is a threat to peace and must disarm. We agree that the Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons and diseases and gases and atomic weapons." [White House]

"America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud." [White House]

February 5, 2003—Secretary of State Colin Powell Address the United Nations⁹

In major address, Secretary Powell lays out the evidence—which he insists is verified through extensive intelligence—of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs.

"My colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence." [White House]

"The gravity of this moment is matched by the gravity of the threat that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world." [White House]

"There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more. And he has the ability to dispense these lethal poisons and diseases in ways that can cause massive death and destruction." [White House]

"We have no indication that Saddam Hussein has ever abandoned his nuclear weapons program. On the contrary, we have more than a decade of proof that he remains determined to acquire nuclear weapons." [White House]

"Saddam Hussein already possesses two out of the three key components needed to build a nuclear bomb. He has a cadre of nuclear scientists with the expertise, and he has a bomb design ... There is no doubt in my mind, these elicited procurement efforts show that Saddam Hussein is very much focused on putting in place the key missing piece from his nuclear weapons program, the ability to produce fissile material." [White House]

"Saddam Hussein's intentions have never changed. He is not developing the missiles for self-defense. These are missiles that Iraq wants in order to project power, to threaten, and to deliver chemical, biological and, if we let him, nuclear warheads." [White House]

February 23, 2003—Pentagon Adviser Richard Perle Writes American Enterprise Institute Piece on Regime Change¹⁰

“The terrified and brutalized people of Iraq will rejoice at the downfall of Saddam Hussein. And when we finally smash his evil regime suddenly those countries that doubt us will have their eyes opened.” [[American Enterprise Institute](#)]

February 26, 2003—President Bush Address the American Enterprise Institute¹¹

In departure from President Bush’s statements against nation building, he says the mission in Iraq is to rebuild the country.

“Bringing stability and unity to a free Iraq will not be easy.” [[White House](#)]

“The United States has no intention of determining the precise form of Iraq’s new government. That choice belongs to the Iraqi people. Yet, we will ensure that one brutal dictator is not replaced by another. All Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected.” [[White House](#)]

“Rebuilding Iraq will require a sustained commitment from many nations, including our own: we will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more. America has made and kept this kind of commitment before—in the peace that followed a world war. After defeating enemies, we did not leave behind occupying armies, we left constitutions and parliaments. We established an atmosphere of safety, in which responsible, reform-minded local leaders could build lasting institutions of freedom. In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home.” [[White House](#)]

March 16, 2003—Vice President Cheney Appears on Meet the Press¹²

Vice President Cheney says Iraq probably has nuclear weapons.

“We know (Saddam has) been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons.” [[Meet the Press](#)]

“Now, I think things have gotten so bad inside Iraq, from the standpoint of the Iraqi people, my belief is we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators. And the president’s made it very clear that our purpose there is, if we are forced to do this, will in fact be to stand up a government that’s representative of the Iraqi people, hopefully democratic due respect for human rights, and it, obviously, involves a major commitment by the United States, but we think it’s a commitment worth making.” [[Meet the Press](#)]

“The read we get on the people of Iraq is there is no question but what they want to the get rid of Saddam Hussein and they will welcome as liberators the United States when we come to do that.” [[Meet the Press](#)]

March 30, 2003—Secretary Rumsfeld on ABC'S "This Week"¹³

Secretary Rumsfeld says the American government is confident in the existence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and their precise location.

"We know where (the weapons of mass destruction) are. They're in the area around Tikrit, and Baghdad, and east, west, south and north somewhat." [Department of Defense]

The WMD Argument Unravels**May 9, 2003—Vanity Fair Interview with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz¹⁴**

Wolfowitz says the administration pursued the weapons of mass destruction argument for bureaucratic reasons.

"The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason." [Department of Defense]

May 29, 2003—Polish TV Station Interviews President Bush¹⁵

President Bush says the United States has found the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, though the located laboratories were ultimately determined not to be related to weapons of mass destruction.

"We found the weapons of mass destruction. We found biological laboratories.... And we'll find more weapons as time goes on. But for those who say we haven't found the banned manufacturing devices or banned weapons, they're wrong, we found them." [White House]

June 23, 2003—Secretary Rumsfeld Press Conference¹⁶

Secretary Rumsfeld says no one in the administration ever asserted that Iraq had nuclear weapons, though Vice President Cheney had made such an assertion on March 16.

"I don't know anybody that I can think of who has contended that the Iraqis had nuclear weapons." [Department of Defense]

July 14, 2003—President Bush Press Conference¹⁷

President Bush insists that the intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq had been sound.

“I think the intelligence I get is darn good intelligence. And the speeches I have given were backed by good intelligence. And I am absolutely convinced today, like I was convinced when I gave the speeches, that Saddam Hussein developed a program of weapons of mass destruction, and that our country made the right decision.” [\[White House\]](#)

September 14, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press¹⁸

Vice President Cheney insists that the weapons of mass destruction program will still be found.

(On lack of biological, chemical and nuclear programs) “My guess is in the end, they’ll be proven right.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

“I think the majority of Iraqis are thankful for the fact that the United States is there, that we came and we took down the Saddam Hussein government.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

January 14, 2004—Secretary Powell Interviewed on BBC¹⁹

“I don’t know that there was anything wrong with the intelligence. We are still looking. We are still searching.” [\[Department of State\]](#)

January 28, 2004—Iraq Survey Group leader and weapons inspector David Kay testifies to the Senate Armed Services Committee²⁰

The administration’s expert on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq admits that there are none to be found.

“It turns out that we were all wrong, probably in my judgment, and that is most disturbing.” [\[CNN\]](#)

March 24, 2004—President Bush Addresses the Radio and Television Correspondents’ Association²¹

Though used as the pretense for war, President Bush now jokes about the non-existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

“Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be here somewhere ... No, no weapons over there ... Maybe under here?” [\[BBC\]](#)

September 8, 2005—ABC News Interview with Colin Powell²²

“It’s a blot. I’m the one who presented it on behalf of the United States to the world, and [it] will always be a part of my record. It was painful. It’s painful now.” [\[ABC\]](#)

December 18, 2005—President Bush Addresses the Nation²³

“But much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong. As your President, I am responsible for the decision to go into Iraq.” [\[White House\]](#)

A Shift to Nation Building***May 1, 2003—President Bush Delivers “Mission Accomplished” speech on board the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln²⁴***

President Bush says the new mission for American troops is to reconstruct Iraq.

“And now our coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country.” [\[White House\]](#)

“We’re helping to rebuild Iraq, where the dictator built palaces for himself, instead of hospitals and schools. And we will stand with the new leaders of Iraq as they establish a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people. The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Our coalition will stay until our work is done. And then we will leave—and we will leave behind a free Iraq.” [\[White House\]](#)

January 20, 2004—President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address²⁵

“The work of building a new Iraq is hard, and it is right. And America has always been willing to do what it takes for what is right. Last January, Iraq’s only law was the whim of one brutal man. Today our coalition is working with the Iraqi Governing Council to draft a basic law, with a bill of rights. We’re working with Iraqis and the United Nations to prepare for a transition to full Iraqi sovereignty by the end of June.” [\[State of the Union\]](#)

May 24, 2004—President Bush Gives Speech at Army War College²⁶

“Our agenda, in contrast, is freedom and independence, security and prosperity for the Iraqi people.” [\[White House\]](#)

“Our coalition has a clear goal, understood by all: to see the Iraqi people in charge of Iraq for the first time in generations.” [\[White House\]](#)

February 2, 2005—President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address²⁷

President Bush says the coalition's aim is to build "a community of free and independent nations."

"The United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else. That is one of the main differences between us and our enemies. They seek to impose and expand an empire of oppression, in which a tiny group of brutal, self-appointed rulers control every aspect of every life. Our aim is to build and preserve a community of free and independent nations, with governments that answer to their citizens, and reflect their own cultures. And because democracies respect their own people and their neighbors, the advance of freedom will lead to peace." [State of the Union]

New Mission to Secure Iraq from Terrorists and Expand Nation Building

October 19, 2005—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice²⁸

Secretary Rice redefines the mission in Iraq.

"Our political military strategy has to be clear, hold and build—to clear areas from insurgent control, to hold them securely, and to build durable national Iraqi institutions." [PBS]

November 29, 2005—Secretary Rumsfeld Press Conference²⁹

Secretary Rumsfeld rebuffs Rice's statement of mission.

"Please, let me just stop right there. Anyone who takes those three words and thinks it means the United States should clear and the United States should hold and the United States should build doesn't understand the situation. It is the Iraqis' country. They've got 28 million people there. They are clearing, they are holding, they are building. They're going to be the ones doing the reconstruction in that country!" [PBS]

January 31, 2006—President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address³⁰

President Bush says he will commit the United States to development of democracy abroad.

"Abroad, our nation is committed to an historic, long-term goal—we seek the end of tyranny in our world... Democracies replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror. Every step toward freedom in the world makes our country safer—so we will act boldly in freedom's cause." [State of the Union]

"We're continuing reconstruction efforts, and helping the Iraqi government to fight corruption and build a modern economy, so all Iraqis can experience the benefits of freedom." [State of the Union]

II. Planning and Execution

Pre-war Notions of Iraq and Proper Use of Military

April 9, 1999—Governor Bush Campaign Speech³¹

Gov. Bush on the campaign trail explains why the military must have an exit strategy when using the military.

“Victory means exit strategy, and it’s important for the President to explain to us what the exit strategy is.” [*Houston Chronicle*]

June 5, 1999—Governor Bush Campaign Speech³²

Gov. Bush says the American public deserves to know the timetable for the use of U.S. forces.

“I think it’s also important for the President to lay out a timetable as to how long they will be involved and when they will be withdrawn.” [*Seattle Post Intelligencer*]

September 23, 1999—Gov. Bush delivers “A Period of Consequences” speech to The Citadel³³

Gov. Bush criticizes the Clinton administration for the Bosnian effort, saying it constituted an open-ended deployment.

“The problem comes with open-ended deployments and unclear military missions. In these cases we will ask, ‘What is our goal, can it be met, and when do we leave?’ ... We will encourage our allies to take a broader role. We will not be hasty. But we will not be permanent peacekeepers, dividing warring parties. This is not our strength or our calling.” [*The Citadel*]

August 27, 2000—Vice Presidential Candidate Dick Cheney on the Campaign Trail³⁴

Cheney reiterates his justification for not attempting regime change in the Persian Gulf War, explaining why entering Baghdad would have been “willy-nilly”.

“Conversations I had with leaders in the region afterwards, they all supported the decision that was made not to go to Baghdad. They were concerned that we not get into a position where we shifted, instead of being the leader of an international coalition to roll back Iraqi aggression, to one in which we were an imperialist power willy-nilly moving into capitals in that part of the world taking down governments.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

October 11, 2000—Gov. Bush debates Vice President Gore³⁵

In the second presidential debate, Bush accuses the Clinton administration of open-ended nation building deployments and an atrophying military.

“(Somalia) started off as a humanitarian mission and it changed into a nation-building mission, and that’s where the mission went wrong. The mission was changed. And as a result, our nation paid a price. And so I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nation-building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war. I think our troops ought to be used to help overthrow the dictator when it’s in our best interests. But in this case it was a nation-building exercise, and same with Haiti. I wouldn’t have supported either.” [\[Second Gore-Bush Presidential Debate\]](#)

“I’m not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say this is the way it’s got to be. We can help. And maybe it’s just our difference in government, the way we view government. I want to empower the people. I want to help people help themselves, not have government tell people what to do. I just don’t think it’s the role of the United States to walk into a country and say, we do it this way, so should you.” [\[Second Gore-Bush Presidential Debate\]](#)

“But maybe I misunderstand where you’re coming from, Mr. Vice President, but I think the United States must be humble and must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own course.” [\[Second Gore-Bush Presidential Debate\]](#)

Misjudging the Enemy, Poor Planning for War

July 11, 2002—Pentagon adviser Richard Perle on PBS³⁶

Perle, who called for regime change through the 1990s, says Iraq conflict will be short and use few troops.

“Now, it isn’t going to be over in 24 hours, but it isn’t going to be months either.” [\[PBS\]](#)

“I would be surprised if we need anything like the 200,000 figure that is sometimes discussed in the press. A much smaller force, principally special operations forces, but backed up by some regular units, should be sufficient.” [\[PBS\]](#)

November 7, 2002—Press Conference with President Bush³⁷

President Bush says war with Iraq is his last choice.

“Hopefully, we can do this peacefully—don’t get me wrong ... War is not my first choice, don’t—it’s my last choice. But nevertheless, it is a—it is an option in order to make the world a more peaceful place.” [White House]

November 15, 2002—Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on Infinity Radio³⁸

Secretary Rumsfeld says the war will not last even half a year.

“The idea that it’s going to be a long, long, long battle of some kind I think is belied by the fact of what happened in 1990 ... Five days or five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn’t going to last any longer than that.” [CBS]

February 25, 2003—General Eric Shinseki, chief of staff of the U.S. Army, testifies to Senate Armed Services Committee³⁹

Gen. Shinseki, the highest ranked Army general, says that the Iraq war effort might take hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

“I would say that what’s been mobilized to this point, something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers ... Assistance from friends and allies would be helpful.” [USA Today]

February 27, 2003—Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz testifies to the House Committee on the Budget⁴⁰

Wolfowitz says that Gen. Shinseki’s two-days earlier testimony was “wildly off the mark.”

“I am reluctant to try to predict anything about what the cost of a possible conflict in Iraq would be—what the possible cost of reconstructing and stabilizing that country afterwards might be. But some of the higher-end predictions that we have been hearing recently, such as the notion that it will take several hundred thousand U.S. troops to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq, are wildly off the mark.

First, it is hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in a post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself and to secure the surrender of Saddam’s security forces and his army—hard to imagine.”

“Second, in making predictions, one should at least pay attention to past experience. And in the case of Iraq, we have some recent experience to look to. The northern third of Iraq has been liberated from Saddam Hussein’s grasp since Operation Provide Comfort, which we undertook just 1 month after the cease-fire of the Persian Gulf war in 1991.” [House Committee on the Budget]

February 27, 2003—Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld Press Conference⁴¹

Sec. Rumsfeld discounts the testimony of Gen. Shinseki, the top Army military official.

“The idea that it would take several hundred thousand U.S. forces, I think, is far from the mark.” [\[CNN\]](#)

March 16, 2003—Vice President Dick Cheney Appears on Meet the Press⁴²

Vice President Cheney says the war will go quickly and require few troops in the long run.

“We need, obviously, a large force and we’ve deployed a large force. To prevail, from a military standpoint, to achieve our objectives, we will need a significant presence there until such time as we can turn things over to the Iraqis themselves. But to suggest that we need several hundred thousand troops there after military operations cease, after the conflict ends, I don’t think is accurate. I think that’s an overstatement.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

Descending into the “Quagmire”**July 18, 2003—Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in the Los Angeles Times⁴³**

Wolfowitz, along with several other high-administration officials, say the war planning was ineffective.

“The so-called forces of law and order (in Baghdad) just kind of collapsed... There’s not a single plan that would have dealt with that. This is a country that was ruled by a gang of terrorist criminals, and they’re still around.” [\[Los Angeles Times\]](#)

August 26, 2003—Washington Post Interview With Coalition Provisional Authority head Paul Bremer⁴⁴

Bremer says the insurgency is unimportant and under control.

“(Insurgents) pose no strategic threat to the United States or to the coalition forces.” [\[Washington Post\]](#)

“I keep reading stories about it’s a country in chaos. This is simply not true. It is not a country in chaos, and Baghdad’s not a city in chaos.” [\[Washington Post\]](#)

September 14, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press⁴⁵

Vice President Cheney dismisses the idea that American troops will have a sustained presence in Iraq.

Russert: “We, in fact, have about 140,000 troops, 20,000 international troops, as well. Did you misjudge the number of troops necessary to secure Iraq after major combat operations?”

Cheney: “Well, you’re going to get into a debate here about—talking about several years, several hundred thousand troops for several years. I think that’s a non-starter. I don’t think we have any plan to do that, Tim. I don’t think it’s necessary to do that.”

[[Meet the Press](#)]

September 24, 2003—Bremer on PBS⁴⁶

“You know, the country is basically peaceful.” [[PBS NewsHour](#)]

May 24, 2004—President Bush Delivers Speech to Army War College⁴⁷

President Bush says troops will remain as long as necessary, but that American will not remain an occupying power forever.

“By keeping our promise on June 30th (to transfer sovereignty), the coalition will demonstrate that we have no interest in occupation. And full sovereignty will give Iraqis a direct interest in the success of their own government.” [[White House](#)]

“Given the recent increase in violence, we will maintain our troop level at the current 138,000 as long as necessary.” [[White House](#)]

“I sent American troops to Iraq to defend our security, not to stay as an occupying power. I sent American troops to Iraq to make its people free, not to make them American.”

[[White House](#)]

October 5, 2004—Former CPA head Paul Bremer Changes Position about the Situation on the Ground in Iraq⁴⁸

Bremer says the coalition was unprepared for violence in Iraq.

“We paid a big price for not stopping it because it established an atmosphere of lawlessness. We never had enough troops on the ground.” [[CNN](#)]

February 2, 2005—President Bush delivers State of the Union Address⁴⁹

In opposition to what he insisted during the 2000 presidential campaign, President Bush says he will not set an “artificial timetable”.

“We will not set an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq, because that would embolden the terrorists and make them believe they can wait us out. We are in Iraq to achieve a result: A country that is democratic, representative of all its people, at peace with its neighbors, and able to defend itself. And when that result is achieved, our men and women serving in Iraq will return home with the honor they have earned.” [\[State of the Union\]](#)

May 30, 2005—Vice President Cheney on Larry King Live⁵⁰

Vice President Cheney says the insurgency is nearing its end.

“But I think the level of activity that we see today, from a military standpoint, I think will clearly decline. I think they’re in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency.” [\[CNN\]](#)

June 28, 2005—President Bush addresses troops at Fort Bragg⁵¹

President Bush insists that there are enough troops in Iraq.

“Some Americans ask me, if completing the mission is so important, why don’t you send more troops? If our commanders on the ground say we need more troops, I will send them. But our commanders tell me they have the number of troops they need to do their job. Sending more Americans would undermine our strategy of encouraging Iraqis to take the lead in this fight. And sending more Americans would suggest that we intend to stay forever, when we are, in fact, working for the day when Iraq can defend itself and we can leave.” [\[White House\]](#)

November 20, 2005—Secretary Rumsfeld Appears on ABC’s “This Week”⁵²

As part of an apparent press tour to distance himself from the Iraq war decision, Secretary Rumsfeld tells George Stephanopoulos that he played a minor role in the decision to go to war.

“I didn’t advocate invasion.” [\[ABC\]](#)

January 31, 2006—President Bush delivers State of the Union address⁵³

President Bush says troop level decisions will be made by military commanders.

“The road of victory is the road that will take our troops home. As we make progress on the ground, and Iraqi forces increasingly take the lead, we should be able to further decrease our troop levels—but those decisions will be made by our military commanders, not by politicians in Washington, D.C.” [\[State of the Union\]](#)

“Our coalition has learned from our experience in Iraq. We’ve adjusted our military tactics and changed our approach to reconstruction.” [\[State of the Union\]](#)

Recognizing a Failed Strategy**April 30, 2006—Former Secretary of State Colin Powell Speaks to Press About Iraq Planning⁵⁴**

Secretary Powell says he tried to convince President Bush and other war planners to use more troops from the outset.

“I have always been one who favored a larger military presence in an operation to make sure that you can deal with the unforeseen, but in the case of the aftermath of the fall of Baghdad, you had institutions being destroyed, you had ministries being burned down, and I have said on many occasions I don’t think we had enough force there at that time to impose order. That’s what we were responsible for, because when you have taken out a government, a regime, then you become responsible for the country.” [\[CNN\]](#)

“I made the case to General Franks and Secretary Rumsfeld before the president that I was not sure we had enough troops, and so the case was made. It was listened to. It was considered. And those responsible for the troop levels, Mr Rumsfeld and General Franks, and the joint chiefs of staff, which include the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, believed they had the appropriate troop level.” [\[USA Today\]](#)

August 3, 2006—Gen. John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. Central Command, testifies to the Senate Armed Services Committee⁵⁵

Gen. Abizaid admits that the situation in Iraq may be approaching civil war.

“I believe that the sectarian violence is probably as bad as I’ve seen it, in Baghdad in particular, and that if not stopped it is possible that Iraq could move toward civil war.” [\[New York Times\]](#)

October 4, 2006—Colin Powell Delivers Lecture in Minneapolis⁵⁶

Powell says the ‘stay the course’ strategy will fail.

“Only the Iraqi people can resolve this ... Staying the course isn’t good enough because a course has to have an end.” [[Star Tribune](#)]

November 3, 2006—Vanity Fair Interviews Kenneth Adelman and former Pentagon Adviser Richard Perle⁵⁷

Both Adelman and Perle try to shed responsibility for Iraq war, which they had advocated.

“I just presumed that what I considered to be the most competent national-security team since Truman was indeed going to be competent. They turned out to be among the most incompetent teams in the post-war era. Not only did each of them, individually, have enormous flaws, but together they were deadly, dysfunctional.” [[Vanity Fair](#)]

“Huge mistakes were made, and I want to be very clear on this: They were not made by neoconservatives, who had almost no voice in what happened, and certainly almost no voice in what happened after the downfall of the regime in Baghdad. I’m getting damn tired of being described as an architect of the war. I was in favor of bringing down Saddam. Nobody said, ‘Go design the campaign to do that.’ I had no responsibility for that.” [[Vanity Fair](#)]

December 29, 2006—General George Casey in the New York Times⁵⁸

General Casey says a long-term military presence will not win the war.

“I have worked very hard to ask for what I need, for what I thought I needed to accomplish the mission ... It’s always been my view that a heavy and sustained American military presence was not going to solve the problems in Iraq over the long term.” [[New York Times](#)]

January 10, 2007—President Bush Announces “A New Way Forward” in Address to the Nation⁵⁹

President Bush, who long advocated a ‘stay the course’ strategy, admits that efforts in Iraq have failed.

“The violence in Iraq—particularly in Baghdad—overwhelmed the political gains the Iraqis had made. Al Qaeda terrorists and Sunni insurgents recognized the mortal danger that Iraq’s elections posed for their cause, and they responded with outrageous acts of murder aimed at innocent Iraqis. They blew up one of the holiest shrines in Shia

Islam—the Golden Mosque of Samarra—in a calculated effort to provoke Iraq’s Shia population to retaliate. Their strategy worked. Radical Shia elements, some supported by Iran, formed death squads. And the result was a vicious cycle of sectarian violence that continues today.” [White House]

“It is clear that we need to change our strategy in Iraq.” [White House]

“Our past efforts to secure Baghdad failed for two principal reasons: There were not enough Iraqi and American troops to secure neighborhoods that had been cleared of terrorists and insurgents. And there were too many restrictions on the troops we did have. Our military commanders reviewed the new Iraqi plan to ensure that it addressed these mistakes. They report that it does. They also report that this plan can work.” [White House]

A New Strategy...

March 28, 2007—President Bush Speaks to National Cattlemen’s Beef Association⁶⁰

“Some call this civil war; others call it emergency—I call it pure evil.” [White House]

June 2007—General Jack Keane Appears in PBS’ “Endgame”⁶¹

General Keane says the Iraqi war plan was a “short-war” strategy and was doomed to failure.

“In ‘03, from a military perspective, from the time we took the regime down, we never made a commitment to secure the population and we never had enough resources to do it.” [PBS]

“When you look back on that and analyze it, it’s a short-war strategy. Nowhere in there is a plan to defeat the insurgency. So we had no military strategy to defeat the insurgency.” [PBS]

“When we did not secure the population, the enemy realized that the population was fair game. We were not securing them. The Iraqis couldn’t do it yet. So what did they do? They began to kill people.” [PBS]

“Once we had made up our minds that we were going to clear, but we didn’t have enough resources to hold, I knew the operation would fail.” [PBS]

“Our chances to succeed in Iraq were just slipping past us. We needed to change the strategy, or else this thing was going to go off a cliff.” [PBS]

July 8, 2007—Former Secretary of State Colin Powell Speech⁶²

“I tried to avoid this war. I took him through the consequences of going into an Arab country and becoming the occupiers.” [TimesOnline]

October 12, 2007—Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez Delivers Speech on Iraq⁶³

Lt. General Sanchez, who had been the top American commander in Iraq, says war leadership has been incompetent.

“After more than four years of fighting, America continues its desperate struggle in Iraq without any concerted effort to devise a strategy that will achieve victory in that war-torn country or in the greater conflict against extremism.” [*New York Times*]

“There was been a glaring and unfortunate display of incompetent strategic leadership within our national leader.” [*New York Times*]

“Continued manipulations and adjustments to our military strategy will not achieve victory. The best we can do with this flawed approach is stave off defeat.” [*New York Times*]

March 19, 2008—ABC News Interview with Vice President Cheney⁶⁴

“I think it’s gone on—insurgency lasted longer than I would have anticipated.” [*White House*]

April 10, 2008—President Bush Addresses the Nation⁶⁵

Addressing the nation, President Bush says the Iraqi people want continued American presence.

“The Iraqis are a proud people who understand the enormity of the challenges they face and are anxious to meet them. But they know that they still need our help until they can stand by themselves.” [*White House*]

March 13, 2008—Washington Post Interviews General Petraeus⁶⁶

“No one (in the U.S. and Iraqi governments) feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation.” [*Washington Post*]

III. Cost of War

Officials Insist Low Cost for Iraq

July 11, 2002—Pentagon adviser Richard Perle on PBS⁶⁷

“Iraq is a very wealthy country. Enormous oil reserves. They can finance, largely finance the reconstruction of their own country. And I have no doubt that they will.” [PBS]

September 16, 2002—Washington Times Interview with White House Aide Lawrence Lindsey⁶⁸

“The likely economic effects would be relatively small ... Under every plausible scenario, the negative effect will be quite small relative to the economic benefits.” [Washington Times]

September 2002—Kenneth M. Pollack⁶⁹

“It is unimaginable that the United States would have to contribute hundreds of billions of dollars and highly unlikely that we would have to contribute even tens of billions of dollars.” [Columbia Journalism Review]

March 16, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press⁷⁰

Vice President Cheney insists that the Iraq war will be almost self-financing

“It will generate billions of dollars a year in cash flow if they get back to their production of roughly three million barrels of oil a day, in the relatively near future. And that flow of resources, obviously, belongs to the Iraqi people, needs to be put to use by the Iraqi people for the Iraqi people and that will be one of our major objectives.” [Meet the Press]

March 27, 2003—Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz⁷¹

“There is a lot of money to pay for this that doesn’t have to be U.S. taxpayer money, and it starts with the assets of the Iraqi people. We are talking about a country that can really finance its own reconstruction and relatively soon.” [Reuters]

April 16, 2003—President Bush Delivers Speech in St. Louis⁷²

President Bush marks the first emergency war supplemental of \$79 billion.

“This morning at the White House, I signed a \$79-billion wartime supplemental to cover the needs directly arising from Operation Iraqi Freedom and the reconstruction of Iraq.” [\[White House\]](#)

April 21, 2003—Office of Management and Budget Director Mitchell Daniels⁷³

“The United States is committed to helping Iraq recover from this conflict, but Iraq will not require sustained aid.” [\[White House\]](#)

April 23, 2003—Ted Koppel Interviews USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios⁷⁴

Natsios says the total cost for Iraqi reconstruction from the United States will be \$1.7 billion.

Koppel: “When you talk about 1.7, you’re not suggesting that the rebuilding of Iraq is gonna be done for \$1.7 billion?”

Natsios: “Well in terms of the American taxpayers contribution, I do, this is it for the U.S. ... They’re going to get in \$20 billion a year in oil revenues. But the American part of this will be \$1.7 billion. We have no plans for any further-on funding for this... That is our plan and that is our intention. And these figures, outlandish figures I’ve seen, I have to say, there’s a little bit of hoopla involved in this.” [\[ABC\]](#)

Costs Begin to Mount**August 26, 2003—Washington Post Interviews Coalition Provisional Authority Director L. Paul Bremer⁷⁵**

Just months after insistence that Iraq reconstruction costs would be minimal, Bremer says it will take tens of billions of dollars.

Bremer said Iraq will need ‘several tens of billions’ of dollars to meet economic needs which he said are “almost impossible to exaggerate.” [\[Washington Post\]](#)

September 14, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press⁷⁶

Vice President Cheney says the cost of war is insignificant compared to the cost of a possible future terrorist attack.

“... the price that we’ve had to pay is not out of line, and certainly wouldn’t lead me to suggest or think that the strategy is flawed or needs to be changed.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

“And whatever the cost is, in terms of casualties or financial resources, it’s a whale of a lot less than trying to recover from the next attack in the United States.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

“We talk about \$87 billion. Yeah, that’s a significant expense. No question about it. But it’s going to be much more expensive down the road if we wait. And it’ll be much more expensive—it’s less money, frankly, than the events of 9/11 imposed on us here in the United States.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

March 19, 2008—ABC News Interview with Vice President Cheney⁷⁷

“Obviously we’ve expended considerable public funds on this enterprise, and those are funds that could have been used for some other purpose.” [\[White House\]](#)

“We didn’t have any way five years ago to estimate what the final cost would be.” [\[White House\]](#)

IV. Defining Victory

The Mission Is Clear and Victory Is Tangible

September 23, 1999—September 23, 1999—Gov. Bush delivers “A Period of Consequences” speech to The Citadel⁷⁸

“I will replace uncertain missions with well-defined objectives.” [\[The Citadel\]](#)

March 6, 2003—President Bush Press Conference⁷⁹

“Our mission is clear in Iraq. Should we have to go in, our mission is very clear: disarmament.” [\[White House\]](#)

March 16, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press⁸⁰

“Our objective will be, if we go in, to defeat whatever forces oppose us, to take down the government of Saddam Hussein, and then to follow on with a series of actions such as eliminating all the weapons of mass destruction, finding where they are and destroying them, preserving the territorial integrity of Turkey. As I say, standing up a broadly representative government that’s preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq and standing up a broadly representative government of the Iraqi people. Those will be our objectives.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

May 1, 2003—President Bush declares victory in “Mission Accomplished” on board the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln⁸¹

“Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.” [\[White House\]](#)

“The Battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11th, 2001, and still goes on.” [\[White House\]](#)

September 14, 2003—Vice President Cheney on Meet the Press⁸²

“We can do what we have to do to prevail in this conflict. Failure’s not an option.”

[[Meet the Press](#)]

June 20, 2004—TIME Interview with CPA Director L. Paul Bremer⁸³

“If you go back and look at what has been accomplished, I would say that we have (done) almost everything we set out to accomplish at liberation. (Bush and Blair) had a vision of an Iraq that was stable, pluralistic, democratic, at peace with itself—and we have accomplished most of that.” [[TIME Magazine](#)]

Elusive Victory**June 28, 2005—President Bush Delivers Speech at Fort Bragg⁸⁴**

“Our mission in Iraq is clear.” [[White House](#)]

“The progress in the past year has been significant, and we have a clear path forward.”

[[White House](#)]

“Our strategy can be summed up this way: As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.”

[[White House](#)]

January 31, 2006—President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address⁸⁵

“We’re on the offensive in Iraq, with a clear plan for victory.” [[White House](#)]

“Our work in Iraq is difficult because our enemy is brutal. But that brutality has not stopped the dramatic progress of a new democracy. In less than three years, the nation has gone from dictatorship to liberation, to sovereignty, to a constitution, to national elections. At the same time, our coalition has been relentless in shutting off terrorist infiltration, clearing out insurgent strongholds, and turning over territory to Iraqi security forces. I am confident in our plan for victory; I am confident in the will of the Iraqi people; I am confident in the skill and spirit of our military. Fellow citizens, we are in this fight to win, and we are winning.” [[White House](#)]

A Redefinition of Victory**January 10, 2007—President Bush Delivers “New Way Forward” Address⁸⁶**

“Victory will not look like the ones our fathers and grandfathers achieved. There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship.” [[White House](#)]

Victory or Surrender

May 20, 2007—Former Speaker Newt Gingrich on Meet the Press⁸⁷

“Either we’re for our allies winning, we should do what it takes for our allies to win, we should actually be in the attitude of winning the war—which we did in less than four years in World War II—or we should recognize, after five and a half years from 9/11, we are, in fact, on a worldwide basis, slowly, gradually losing the fight against terrorism and the fight against dictatorship.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

“I would lean forward and say to the world, ‘We are, by George, going to make sure that the allies of America and the forces of freedom win, and we are the most powerful nation in history, and we have more than enough assets to do this.’ And we ought to do what it takes to win, not tolerate legislating defeat.” [\[Meet the Press\]](#)

An Undefined Victory

June 4, 2007—San Antonio Express News Interview with Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez⁸⁸

“I think if we do the right things politically and economically with the right Iraqi leadership we could still salvage at least a stalemate, if you will—not a stalemate but at least stave off defeat. It’s also kind of important for us to answer the question, ‘What is victory?’ and at this point I’m not sure America really knows what victory is.” [\[San Antonio Express News\]](#)

June 2007—Gen. Jack Keane on PBS’s Endgame⁸⁹

“The rhetoric that the president was evidencing in his remarks—he would use terms like ‘win,’ ‘We’re going to defeat the insurgents,’ ‘victory’—that all, that all would lend itself to a military strategy whose purpose was to defeat the insurgency. We never had that as a mission in Iraq.” [\[PBS\]](#)

March 27, 2008—President Bush Delivers Speech at National Museum of the U.S. Air Force⁹⁰

“But there’s one thing that is consistent. No matter what shortcomings these critics diagnose, their prescription is always the same—retreat. They claim that our strategic interest is elsewhere, and that if we would just get out of Iraq, we could focus on the battles that really matter. This argument makes no sense.” [\[White House\]](#)

April 8, 2008—Gen. David Petraeus Testifies to Senate Armed Services Committee⁹¹

“We haven’t turned any corners. We haven’t seen any lights at the end of the tunnel.”

[*New York Times*]

“The Champagne bottle has been pushed to the back of the refrigerator. And the progress, while real, is fragile and is reversible.” [*New York Times*]

April 8, 2008—Amb. Ryan Crocker Testifies to Senate Armed Services Committee⁹²

“I said in September that I cannot guarantee success in Iraq. That is still the case, although I think we are now closer. I remain convinced that a major departure from our current engagement would bring failure.” [*Senate Armed Services Committee*]

April 10, 2008—President Bush Addresses the Nation⁹³

Addressing the troops directly, President Bush drastically redefines victory in Iraq to mean that only when Iraq can fight common enemies in the Middle East that U.S. troops can return home.

“The day will come when Iraq is a capable partner of the United States. The day will come when Iraq is a stable democracy that helps fight our common enemies and promote our common interests in the Middle East. And when that day arrives, you’ll come home with pride in your success, and the gratitude of your whole nation.” [*White House*]

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