Changing Rationales

A Timeline of Bush Administration Quotes on Iraq

Bryan Thomas and Rudy deLeon
May 2008
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.”


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.”
WE PROVIDE THIS TIMELINE AND 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 timeline and text is organized in four sections.

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

An expanded version of this timeline can be found at www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/05/iraq_timeline.html.

Bryan Thomas and Rudy deLeon
Center for American Progress
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REASONS FOR WAR

Early Calls for War

1998

- Saddam Hussein acquires 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, 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 at risk...in the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.

1999

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2003

- We know (Saddam has) been absolutely determined to get more and better weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against future confrontations with his neighbors.

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May 28, 2003

- 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.

January 29, 2002

- The administration’s expert on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, David Kay, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee and admits that there are none to be found.

2004

- It turns that we were all wrong, professed in my judgment, on Iraq... and most disturbing.

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February 28, 2004

- We think the intelligence I get on disarmament is good intelligence. And the speeches we have given were backed by good intelligence. And we are absolutely convinced today, like I was convinced when I gave the speeches, that Saddam Hussein has nuclear weapons.

A Shift to Nation Building

2004

- The United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else.

- The Bush administration expects the next stage of the war in Iraq to be a transition to a government of and for the Iraqi people.

November 28, 2003

- We call upon Saddam Hussein to bring about the restoration of democracy and a government of and for the Iraqi people, and to complete the democratic transition in a timely fashion.

February 12, 2003

- The United States will “work closely with the Iraqi people” to “build a community of free and independent nations” at the State of the Union.

New Quest to Secure Iraq from Terrorists and Expand Nation Building

2006

- Iraqilyn talks to continue to foster stability in Iraq and to support the Iraqi government.

- The United States of America said it would commit the United States to development of democracy abroad and in the region.

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Pre-War Notions of Iraq and Proper Use of Military

September 29, 2006

“...it’s gone on—for insurgencies lasted longer than I would have anticipated”

ABC News Interviews with Vice President Cheney

Misjudging the Enemy, Poor Planning for War

February 27, 2007

“The idea that it’s going to be a long, long, bitter battle of some kind—or that it’s finished by the fact of what happened in 1999... Five days or five weeks or five months... we will go quickly and require few troops in the long run.”

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Victoria科比 says the war not fast but then half a year.

Descending into the “Quagmire”

August 28, 2006

“I wouldn’t say that we have made mistakes to this point, something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers... Assistance from friends and allies would be helpful.”

On ABC News, Vice President Cheney says the war will go quickly and require free troops in the long run.

Recognizing a Failed Strategy

October 8, 2006

“I’ve seen it, in Baghdad in particular, and that if not stopped, it is possible that Iraq could move toward civil war.”

On the campaign trail, Vice Presidential candidate Dick Cheney renewal his justification for not regenerating regime change in the Islamic State.

A New Strategy...

October 12, 2007

“...from the time we took the regime down, we never had enough resources to hold, I knew the problem comes with open-ended deployments and uncertain military missions. In these cases we will ask, ‘What is it that we were responsible for, because we had enough force there at that time to impose stability in post-Saddam Iraq, are wildly off the mark.’”

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Former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

January 10, 2007

No one (in the U.S. and Iraqi governments) feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the desperate struggle in Iraq without any concerted effort to devise a strategy that will achieve a result: A country that is democratic, capable of self-defense, 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.”

Paul Bremer says the insurgency is unimportant and under control.

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The war is not set as an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq, because that would embolden the terrorists and make them believe that we can walk out. We are in Iraq to achieve a result: A country that is democratic, capable of self-defense, 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.”

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"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." **Vice-President Cheney**

"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." **Amato J. Picciotto**

"There is a lot of money to pay for 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." **Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz**

"We didn't have any way five years ago to estimate what the final cost would be." **ABC News interview with Vice-President Cheney**
The Mission Is Clear and Victory Is Tangible

SEPTEMBER 25, 2004

I will repeat uncertain missions with well-defined objectives.**

George W. Bush

An Undefined Victory

APRIL 10, 2008

"The day will come when Iraq is a capable partner of the United States. This day will come when Iraq is a stable democracy that helps fight our common enemies and promotes 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."**

George W. Bush

A Redefinition of Victory

JANUARY 31, 2006

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

George W. Bush

Voter approve a new constitution for an Islamic federal democracy.

OCTOBER 15, 2005

George W. Bush

Elusive Victory

JUNE 28, 2004

"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.**

George W. Bush

Victory or Surrender

JULY 10, 2007

"We would have no need to be on the desk of a battle-**

George W. Bush

An aerial view of a U.S. aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003

APRIL 8, 2008

"Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.**

George W. Bush
ENDNOTES

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

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