

Barack Obama's Iraq Speech: 2 October 2002

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by Barack Obama

Delivered on Wednesday, October 2, 2002 by Barack Obama, Illinois State Senator, at the first high-profile Chicago anti-Iraq war rally (organized by Chicagoans Against War in Iraq) at noon in Federal Plaza in Chicago, Illinois; at the same day and hour that President Bush and Congress announced their agreement on the joint resolution authorizing the Iraq War, but over a week before it was passed by either body of Congress.

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 September 11th, 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 a 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. What I am opposed to is the cynical attempt by Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz and other arm-chair, weekend warriors in this Administration to shove their own ideological agendas down our throats, irrespective of the costs in lives lost and in hardships borne.

What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like Karl Rove to distract us from a rise in the uninsured, a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income — to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone through the worst month since the Great Depression.

That's what I'm opposed to. A dumb war. 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 US 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-Qaeda.

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-Qaeda, 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 UN 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.

Compare Barak Obama's speech with these two *subsequent* speeches:

(1) Robert Byrd (Senior Senator from West Virginia): *The Arrogance of Power*

Delivered on 19 March 2003 on the floor of the U.S. Senate, shortly before the U.S. invasion of Iraq

I believe in this beautiful country. I have studied its roots and gloried in the wisdom of its magnificent Constitution, and its inimitable history. I have marveled at the wisdom of its founders and framers. Generation after generation of Americans has understood the lofty ideals that underlie our great Republic. I have been inspired by the story of their sacrifice and their strength.

But, today I weep for my country. 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 peace keeper. 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 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 U.N. Security Council members like ingrates who offend our princely dignity by lifting their heads from the carpet. Valuable alliances are split. After war has ended, the United States will have to rebuild much more than the country of Iraq. We will have to rebuild America's image around the globe.

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-Qaida, 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.

The brutality seen on September 11th and in other terrorist attacks we have witnessed around the globe are the violent and desperate efforts by extremists to stop the daily encroachment of western values upon their cultures. That is what we fight. It is a force not confined to borders. It is a shadowy entity with many faces, many names, and many addresses.

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. If we attack Saddam Hussein, we will probably drive him from power. But, the zeal of our friends to assist our global war on terrorism may have already taken flight.

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? A pall has fallen over the Senate Chamber. We avoid our solemn duty to debate the one topic on the minds of all Americans, even while scores of thousands of our sons and daughters faithfully do their duty in Iraq.

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?

War appears inevitable. But, I continue to hope that the cloud will lift. Perhaps Saddam will yet turn tail and run. Perhaps reason will somehow still prevail. I along with millions of Americans will pray for the safety of our troops, for the innocent civilians in Iraq, and for the security of our homeland. May God continue to bless the United States of America in the troubled days ahead, and may we somehow recapture the vision which for the present eludes us.

(2) Senator John McCain (Senior Senator, Arizona): Remarks Prio to the U.S. Invasion of Iraq

Delivered on 19 March 2003, shortly before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, on the floor of the U.S. Senate, in response to remarks made by Robert Byrd.

Madam President, 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.

I believe that, obviously, we will remove a threat to America's national security because we will find there are still massive amounts of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Although Theodore Roosevelt is my hero and role model, I also, in many ways, am Wilsonian in the respect that America, this great nation of ours, will again contribute to the freedom and liberty of an oppressed people who otherwise never might enjoy those freedoms.

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.