

Dick Cheney is a war criminal: assorted thoughts on the US invasion of Iraq in 2003

Dan Marten (/node/314)

TechNews Writer

Pronouns: (He/Him)

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Dick Cheney, former Vice President of the United States under George W. Bush, ought to be considered a war criminal for his malicious — but not ignorant — support of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. In knowingly supporting a conflict with self-serving and facetious claims, he ought to be responsible for the deaths of both 4,500 U.S. soldiers and upwards of 150,000 Iraqi combatants and non-combatants in the immediately following years. This says nothing of the casualties brought on by the coming instability after the U.S. invasion and regime change, more famously culminating in the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the wake of the power vacuum around 2014. I'm embarrassed by the fact that this man walks free.

The Bush Administration, equally as driven by the more ambitious and active Cheney behind the scenes, used the false pretense of finding hidden weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq to drum up domestic and international support for an invasion. The dictator of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, had very much not been a friend of the U.S. for over a decade at this point — having already fought the United States Armed Forces and lost during Iraq's crushing defeat in the First Gulf War of 1991 — and a regime change to install a friendlier puppet government had been on the U.S. foreign policy agenda since day one of Bush's term. For all of Saddam Hussein's horrible faults, which he had many, one thing he was not doing was developing weapons of mass destruction to use against the United States of America or its allies.

Cheney undoubtedly knew this but propagated the myth regardless. In November 2002, United Nations (UN) weapons inspectors were sent to Iraq to either uncover WMDs or to discover Iraq's ability to produce them. They were sent after an ultimatum from the Bush (see: Cheney) Administration, declaring that if they were not admitted, it would be proof that Iraq had WMDs the entire time and was trying desperately to hide them. However, when the UN turned up nothing conclusive, the Cheney Administration trotted out the rhetoric in the vein of “the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence,” claiming that the UN's inability to find WMDs was not proof that they didn't exist, but rather proof of the inefficiency of international bureaucracy. The administration then presented dubious figures on how long it potentially could take Iraq to go nuclear, followed by claims that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other branches of U.S. Intelligence had uncovered “secret evidence” that Iraq was plausibly in possession of nuclear weapons, or enough to warrant an invasion at least.

All of those claims were either fabricated or flimsy at best, with the U.S. State apparatus either being catastrophically dishonest or painfully incompetent — or both!

Still, this did not stop the march towards war. The boulder was already in motion; the massive inertia of the U.S. government was already unstoppable. The U.S. Congress had already passed the Iraq Resolution in late 2002, giving the administration full authority to “use any means necessary” against Iraq. This is the “voting for the Iraq War” vote many U.S. politicians still talk about or defend today. Weeks before the invasion, up to 64 percent of the American people believed in military action against Saddam Hussein, too.

In March of 2003, the combined arms of the United States of America invaded Iraq. The government was toppled within weeks and Saddam ousted. George W. Bush was claiming “mission accomplished” by May of 2003. Though years of vicious insurgencies would follow, this was somehow beyond the administration's foresight.

In the whole country, during the whole invasion of Iraq and the capture of all its military bases and facilities, the WMDs that the U.S. swore existed were never found. They were a myth, and people were finding out that they had been duped into a false war, so the Cheney Administration pivoted hard.

Saddam Hussein was not a good man, and the U.S. public is not especially versed in Arab politics, so coming up with tertiary and quaternary justifications to placate the voters — who would reelect Bush & Cheney in 2004 — was not that difficult of a task. Claims like “bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq” or “God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq” or “Iraq is a state sponsor of al-Qaeda” or “Saddam was committing humanitarian crimes” were not too difficult to come by. In fact, Iraq was not a state sponsor of al-Qaeda, as that title would actually go to one of the U.S.'s closest allies in the region Saudi Arabia. The U.S. has also propped up and continues to support regimes with far worse humanitarian crises than Iraq (see again: Saudi Arabia, U.S. support of Pinochet, U.S. support of the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s, this could be a whole article in itself) so that falls flat.

Dick Cheney is a coward for not just telling the world that “the United States wants safe access to the oil in Iraq and the shipping routes in the Persian Gulf. Iraq is not supportive of U.S. policy in the region and Saddam is belligerent.” Honesty in that situation, being that the U.S. was willing to kill innocent civilians and ship off its own sons and daughters to war for oil money and geopolitical gains, would have been equally refreshing and interesting to see how it would fly on the global stage. Instead, Dick Cheney lied so we could lose 4500 American lives with thousands more scarred by injuries and trauma, not to mention the damage in Iraq.

Instead, Cheney was willing to kill for oil money.

Up next: how Dick Cheney made money off of the Iraq War

Note: I have bitten off way more than I could chew with this topic, so expect at least a couple more articles on this topic. Up next is Dick Cheney being a war profiteer and his actual concrete ties to the politics (which I realize is a blind spot in this article), followed by one on Illinois Tech's student body's response to the war, possibly followed by more on Saddam or questionable foreign policy.



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