

Iraq war lies and impeachment: Official Washington tiptoes round the “i” word

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The American political establishment has responded with a mixture of silence, unease and outright hostility to the first suggestion by a prominent Washington insider that President George W. Bush could be impeached for his actions in taking the United States into a war with Iraq on the basis of lies.

Senator Bob Graham of Florida, former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, first raised the issue publicly July 17 at a campaign forum in New Hampshire. In response to a question, he said Bush’s claim in his State of the Union speech that Iraq had sought uranium in Africa was clearly a lie, and given the example set by the House Republicans in the impeachment of Clinton, a lie was an impeachable offense.

Bush’s lie was on a far more serious subject than Clinton’s, he said, since it concerned reasons for going to war, not personal sexual conduct. “This is a case in which someone has committed actions that took America to war, put American men and women’s lives at risk, and they continue to be at risk,” Graham declared. “If the standard that was set by the House of Representatives relative to Bill Clinton is the new standard for impeachment, then this clearly comes within that standard.”

He repeated his comments during the week that followed and was questioned about it on national television interview programs on Sunday, July 27.

Graham repeated essentially the same statements on both Fox News and NBC’s *Meet the Press*. On Fox his interviewer was Brit Hume, a fervent right-winger and Bush supporter who did not attempt to disguise his hostility. Hume repeatedly interrupted the senator as though he could not believe that Graham was actually raising the issue of impeachment, and attempted to argue against it. The following exchange took place:

Hume: Now, are you saying that this president knowingly misled the American people about the reasons for going to war?

Graham: Yes, I ...

Hume: Intentionally?

Graham: This—well, he did it knowingly. Certainly this president ...

Hume: When did he do that?

Graham: He did it, for one instance, in the State of the Union address, when he made a statement that he must have known—or certainly should have known, since it was a statement based on an investigation requested by his vice president ...

Hume: I understand that.

Graham: ... to find out whether the Niger issue was correct or not. And then second, I think he also withheld information....

Hume: Are you saying that because he did not lay out with foresight—clairvoyance, even—what would happen after victory, that that’s an impeachable offense?

Graham: It didn’t take clairvoyance to understand what the consequences of military victory in Iraq was going to be. The president...

Hume: Are you saying that’s impeachable?

Graham: No. I am saying—I asked the question, here are the standards that were used to impeach Bill Clinton, here are just some of the actions of this president. Let the American people decide if the US House of Representatives has set the proper standard for impeachment...

Later, another Fox panelist, National Public Radio correspondent Mara Liasson, asked Graham directly, referring to Bush, “whether his deceptions rise to the same standard that the House of Representatives set in the Clinton case.”

Graham responded, “Clearly, if the standard is now what the House of Representatives did in the impeachment of Bill Clinton, the actions of this president are much more serious in terms of dereliction of duty for the president of the United States.” He said the issue was academic, however, because “Tom DeLay and the other leadership of the House of Representatives are not going to impeach George W. Bush.”

Meet the Press host Tim Russert disposed of the question more briefly, asking Graham about his initial statement on

impeachment as though it were a gaffe on the campaign trail that he might want to retract. Russert, it should be noted, was among the most avid media promoters of the Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal and apologists for the official witch-hunt conducted by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr.

Graham denied that it was a mistake for him to raise the possibility of impeachment, but reiterated that no action was to be expected: “The current leadership of the House of Representatives, regardless of what standard they set for Bill Clinton, are not going to apply the same standard to George W. Bush. The good news is that, in November of 2004, the American people will have an opportunity to both impeach and remove.”

Graham is by no means an incidental figure, in either official Washington or the Democratic Party. He is the half-brother of the late Philip Graham, whose wife Katharine was the long-time publisher of the *Washington Post*, and the uncle of the current publisher, Donald Graham. A “centrist” in the parlance of the American media—i.e., a staunch conservative, but not a Christian fundamentalist or ultra-rightist—Bob Graham was under active consideration to be the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 1992 and in 2000, although passed over both times.

As chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2001 and 2002, Graham is in possession of far more information that has yet been made public about the September 11 terrorist attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. He has repeatedly hinted that the full truth about the “war on terrorism,” were it to come out, would be damning to the Bush administration.

In an extremely convoluted and cautious way, the senator from Florida has raised explosive political issues: the legitimacy of the 1998 impeachment of Clinton, and of the American invasion and conquest of Iraq.

If one translates from his bland phrases about the “standard” set by the House of Representatives in impeaching Clinton, the implications are unmistakable: In 1998, the Republican House impeached Clinton on trumped-up charges of lying about his personal relations with Monica Lewinsky, seeking to overturn the results of two presidential elections on the flimsiest of pretexts. Now, the Republican administration of George W. Bush has taken the United States into war on the basis of lies—a crime infinitely more serious than Clinton’s private misdemeanors.

In other words, the Republican Party, under the control of an extreme right-wing clique, is engaged in what can only be described as criminal behavior—the attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government in America, followed by the invasion and conquest of Iraq. This is well understood throughout the US political establishment, although the mass media deliberately conceals this reality from the American

people.

The consensus in official Washington is that such issues must not be raised, because they call into question not only the conduct of the Bush administration, but the legitimacy of the entire US political and media establishment, which is complicit in the extreme-right takeover of the federal government. Hence the vitriolic response by Hume and Russert, both of whom suggested—more by tone of voice than by language—that even to mention the word impeachment in the same sentence with Bush was proof of political derangement.

The Democratic Party leadership shares this view, as evidenced by the hostility with which Graham’s comments were received, not only by his fellow presidential candidates, but by leading congressional Democrats. Only hours after Graham’s televised comments, Democratic Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois, speaking on the CNN interview program *Late Edition*, flatly rejected any discussion of impeachment, claiming “the evidence doesn’t support” Graham’s comments.

“There is absolutely no evidence that the president knowingly misled the American people,” Durbin said. “I’ve never made that charge, nor have I heard it from any credible source.” The most that could be said about the war in Iraq is that those around Bush “misled him and misled the American people indirectly.”

Graham, for his own reasons, has touched a nerve in the body politic. The hostile political and media reaction to his comments on impeachment demonstrates both the fragility of the Bush administration—whose public support is largely illusory—and growing nervousness in the Washington establishment over the mounting social, political and military crisis which this government confronts.



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