

Jeb Bush's "gaffe": A revealing comment on the Iraq war

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Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush, in an interview with Fox News May 11, blurted out a politically inconvenient truth: that any of the Republican candidates in 2016, as well as their likely Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, would have authorized the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Asked by interviewer Megyn Kelly about the decision by his brother, President George W. Bush, to go to war against Iraq in March 2003, Bush replied, "I would have, and so would have Hillary Clinton, just to remind everybody. And so would almost everybody that was confronted with the intelligence they got."

Bush spent the rest of the week seeking to remedy his "gaffe," which was failing to tell the now politically mandatory lie, that "if we had only known that the intelligence was wrong" connecting Saddam Hussein to weapons of mass destruction and Al Qaeda terrorism, the war would never have happened.

On Tuesday, Bush phoned into the Sean Hannity program on Fox to begin the process of retraction and correction, claiming that he had "interpreted the question wrong, I guess." He added, "I was talking about, given what people knew then." When Hannity repeated Kelly's question about the 2003 invasion, Bush stalled, saying, "That's a hypothetical."

On Wednesday Bush was pressed for further responses to his "gaffe," as five rivals for the Republican nomination—senators Ted Cruz, Rand Paul and Marco Rubio, and governors Chris Christie and John Kasich—all proclaimed that they would never have ordered the invasion of Iraq if they knew that Baghdad had no weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein had no ties to Al Qaeda.

At a town hall meeting in Reno, Nevada, Bush was publicly questioned by a liberal college student about the US war being the root cause of the emergence of

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. "Your brother created ISIS," she said, pointing to the US dissolution of the Iraqi Army in 2003, which created a pool of jobless soldiers and officers who later joined insurgent groups, including Al Qaeda in Iraq, the forerunner of ISIS.

Bush again refused to answer the question of whether he would, in retrospect, still back an invasion of Iraq, calling it hypothetical, and suggesting that the very posing of the question was disrespectful of the soldiers who died in the war. "It's very hard for me to say that their lives were lost in vain," he said. "Their sacrifice was worth honoring, not depreciating."

This is a typical cover-up for presidential war crimes, used by George W. Bush and Barack Obama alike. Any criticism of the "commander-in-chief" is smeared as an attack on the soldiers they have ordered to wage wars in violation of international law, using methods that trample on the Geneva conventions and US laws prohibiting torture and assassination.

The younger Bush finally settled on an outright reversal of his position, telling an audience Thursday, in Tempe, Arizona, "Knowing what we now know, what would you have done? I would have not engaged. I would not have gone into Iraq." While verbally disavowing the Iraq war of 2003, however, he enthusiastically endorsed the Iraq war of 2015, saying that the US should increase its military presence to fight the "barbaric Islamic threat," adding, "I think we need to reengage and do it in a more forceful way."

Aside from the remarkably broad language—"Islamic threat" could apply to the entire Muslim population of the world, some 1.6 billion people—Bush's final declaration only confirms the actual unanimity within the US ruling elite on a program of global military aggression, whatever the claimed differences during the period of electoral competition between the Democrats

and the Republicans.

The *Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial criticizing both Bush's initial response and his subsequent backtracking, took the candidate to task for failing to defend the legitimacy of the two major military decisions of his brother's administration: to invade and conquer Iraq in 2003 and to "surge" additional US troops into Iraq in 2007 after the outbreak of open civil war between Shiite and Sunni militias.

The editorial repeated the lie that has now become standard in apologias for the war in Iraq: "George W. Bush took the country to war in the sincere belief that Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction was a 'slam dunk' case, as then-CIA Director George Tenet believed."

The truth is very different. Bush and Cheney took office in January 2001 at the head of an administration that was determined from the beginning to overthrow Saddam Hussein and replace him with an American puppet. The only question was to find the necessary pretext for overriding popular opposition to such a war. This was provided by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, although Iraq had nothing to do with them.

Within days of 9/11, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other neo-conservative warmongers had begun the drumbeat for war with Iraq, suggesting connections between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Other administration spokesmen, including national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and secretary of state Colin Powell, were deployed to raise the supposed threat of "weapons of mass destruction."

The atmosphere in the leading circles of the Bush administration was described by a British official close to them, who told *Newsweek* magazine in August 2002, "Everyone wants to go to Baghdad. Real men want to go to Tehran." In other words, the only difference was whether conquering Iraq should be followed up by war with Iran, a country of 75 million people.

The CIA merely supplied its political masters in the White House and Pentagon what they were demanding: supposed "proof" of Iraqi WMD and Saddam's ties to Al Qaeda, to provide the *casus belli*. This manufactured case was used to push a war resolution through Congress—with the support, as Jeb Bush noted, of Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and other leading Democrats.

Those responsible for planning, orchestrating and

promoting the criminal war against Iraq have never been brought to justice. On the contrary, many of them are now among the principal foreign policy advisers of the Jeb Bush campaign, including Wolfowitz, Stephen Hadley and Michael Chertoff, who were among the architects of the war in Iraq. As for the Obama administration, it has merely continued and expanded the crimes of its predecessor.



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