



Jeb Bush “Misheard” Iraq Question; Now Has No Answer

Tuesday’s “clarification” and equivocation failed to lift the “fog of war” surrounding the question of whether Jeb Bush thinks his brother’s invasion of Iraq was a good idea. Bush’s evasive answer to the question posed by *Fox News* host Megyn Kelly in a recorded interview aired Monday night has drawn sharp criticism of the former Florida governor and likely presidential candidate from across the political spectrum.



“Knowing what we know now, would you have authorized the invasion?” Kelly asked.

“I would have,” Bush replied, “and so would have Hillary Clinton, just to remind everybody, and so would have almost everybody who was confronted with the intelligence they got.” Bush “misheard” the question, apparently missing the part about “Knowing what we know now,” according to a political ally.

In an [interview on CNN Tuesday](#) Ana Navarro, a Republican strategist from Florida who has been a Bush ally, said she contacted the former governor for an explanation of his answer. “I emailed him this morning and I said to him, ‘Hey, I’m a little confused by this answer so I’m genuinely wondering did you mishear the question?’” Navarro said in the interview. “And he said, ‘Yes, I misheard the question.’”

Bush himself said on Sean Hannity’s radio program Tuesday that he had misinterpreted the question. So now that he has had a few days to get the question straight, we may expect a forthright answer, right? Wrong.

“Yeah, I don’t know what that decision would have been,” [he told Hannity](#). “That’s a hypothetical.” Bush acknowledged that “there were mistakes as it related to faulty intelligence in the lead-up to the war and the lack of focus on security.... So we need to learn from the past to make sure we’re strong and secure going forward.”

But how do we learn from the past if all questions about what might or should have been done differently are to be dismissed as “hypothetical”? By that reasoning, Bush need not answer any question about what he might do if and when he assumes command in the Oval Office. Any question about what he will or would do as president is, by definition, hypothetical.

Whether he “misheard” or misinterpreted the question, “that doesn’t make the answer he gave any better,” wrote Daniel Larison at [The American Conservative](#). He explained,

Bush was using fairly typical Iraq war dead-ender talking points (i.e., “intelligence was faulty,” “mistakes were made later”), and I assume that he started calling them to mind as soon as he [heard](#) the word Iraq come from the interviewer’s lips. If he “misheard” the question, it was because he was already preparing to give the pat, unthinking answer on the subject that so many pro-war politicians have given before him.

Unrepentant war supporters have used these slogans for years to obscure the truth that waging a preventive war for regime change has been indefensible and outrageous all along. Like them, Bush doesn’t have the slightest idea that there might have been something wrong with launching an



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 13, 2015

illegal war to “prevent” a threat that opponents knew at the time to be either grossly exaggerated or non-existent. It doesn’t matter what question Bush thought he was answering. He proved that he shouldn’t be trusted with the presidency based on the content of the answer he gave.

Obviously, the question is an especially awkward one for Bush, given that the president who started the war is his brother. But most of the declared and anticipated candidates for the GOP presidential nomination will also have a difficult time answering — or evading — the same question.

Should they disavow the signature foreign policy “achievement” of the last Republican president, whose “mission accomplished” brought “regime change” to Iraq and eliminated the alleged threat to the world from Saddam Hussein and his mythical weapons of mass destruction? Should they admit that waging preventive war based on conflicting and dubious intelligence is wrong, though most of them likely supported that decision, whether or not they were in political office at the time?

Or should they still endorse a war the American public turned against, costing the GOP the Congress in 2006 and the White House in 2008? Should they say of the war that left more than 4,400 Americans dead and more than 32,000 Americans wounded, killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, made refugees of millions more and will cost the United States \$1 trillion or more, that the architects of that disaster made the right decision, based on “the intelligence they got”?

Among Republicans who have declared their candidacies or are still “exploring” a presidential campaign, only Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky has openly criticized President George W. Bush’s decision to wage war in Iraq — a war the senator’s father, Ron Paul, fought against, both as a member of Congress and as a Republican presidential candidate. Yet even Senator Paul sounds at times as though he is trying to win at least [a few honorary feathers](#) from the party’s establishment hawks. Even if the Democratic opponent next year is the hawkish Hillary Clinton, who voted to authorize the war, the Iraq fiasco is firmly fixed in the American mind as a project of the man and the party in the White House at the time.

The GOP can ill afford to once again come before the voters as the “Wars ‘R’ Us” party.



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