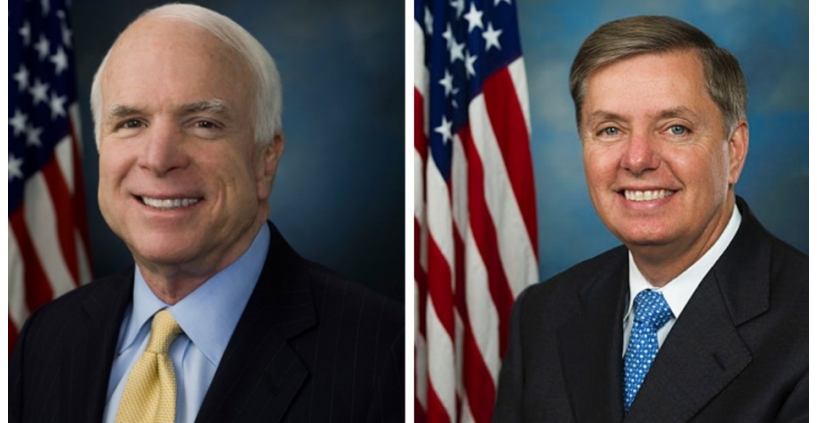




Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 7, 2014

## McCain, Graham Blame Obama for Al-Qaeda Resurgence in Iraq

Republican Senators John McCain of Arizona (left) and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina (right) were among those [blaming President Obama](#) for the capture by al-Qaeda-affiliated forces of territory in Iraq formerly under the control of the Baghdad government, including the city of Fallujah, taken by U.S. forces in 2004 after one of the deadliest battles of the eight-year long Iraq War. Fallujah became a focal point in the war when insurgents killed four American security contractors and hung their burned bodies from a bridge. Rebel forces captured the city on Friday after a three-day battle and raised the black al-Qaeda flag over government buildings as a sign of victory, the *Washington Post* [reported](#).



McCain and Graham blamed the latest turn of events on Obama's withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq at the end of 2011, when the Status of Forces Agreement between the two countries expired. In a joint statement, the senators called the insurgents' triumphs "as tragic as they were predictable."

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"While many Iraqis are responsible for this strategic disaster, the administration cannot escape its share of the blame," they said. When the president withdrew U.S. forces "over the objections of our military leaders and commanders on the ground," McCain and Graham said, "many of us predicted that the vacuum would be filled by America's enemies and would emerge as a threat to U.S. national security interests. Sadly, that reality is now clearer than ever."

The senators disputed the administration's version of the stalemate that led to the withdrawal at the end of the 2011, the expiration date in the Status of Forces Agreement negotiated between the Iraq government and the George W. Bush administration. The United States lobbied the Baghdad government for an extension of the agreement in 2011, but the Iraqis balked at a provision that exempted American personnel from prosecution and trial by the Iraqi government for crimes committed in their country. The United States was unwilling to drop that provision, and no agreement on authorization of an extension of U.S. troop presence was reached.

"The administration's narrative that Iraq's political leadership objected to U.S. forces remaining in Iraq after 2011 is patently false," charged McCain and Graham, both enthusiastic supporters of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion in a campaign dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom. "We know firsthand that Iraq's main political blocs were supportive and that the administration rejected sound military advice and squandered the opportunity to conclude a security agreement with Iraq."

On *Fox News Sunday*, Brit Hume, a regular on the cable news channel, also blamed the recent



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developments on the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces after eight years of fighting that followed the overthrow of the government of Iraq dictator Saddam Hussein.

“They’re back in no small measure because we left,” Hume [said](#) of the al-Qaeda and affiliated forces. “The American people would not be happy with a continued American presence in Iraq,” he conceded, while arguing: “It is the job of a President as leader to bring people along about such things.... It is a role, from which this President has shrunk and the consequences of that are now becoming clear and what’s happening in Iraq and what is also unfolding in Syria are but two manifestations of it.”

Hume did not say whether he believes the United States should be waging war on behalf of the al-Qaeda-supported insurgents in Syria, while continuing to fight against the insurgency in Iraq. Other members of the Fox News panel, including syndicated columnist George Will, expressed their doubts about the argument that American troops should still be defending government outposts in Iraq. Noting that American forces were engaged in the fighting in Iraq for twice as long as the United States fought in World War II, Will said: “There are those who say that had the President successfully negotiated a residual force to remain in Iraq, this ongoing civil war with regional overlays would not be nearly as serious. I am skeptical of that and very skeptical that the American people would have put up with it.”

Neither McCain nor Graham nor any other prominent supporter of President Bush’s decision to invade and occupy Iraq has expressed any remorse over that decision, despite the apparent non-existence of the Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” that had been cited repeatedly as the major reason for the invasion. McCain, in particular, claimed credit for having advocated the 2007 surge of U.S. forces in Iraq that helped turn the tide against the al-Qaeda-backed insurgents, a point he raised frequently in his 2008 campaign for president.

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader, a Green Party candidate for president in 2000, offered a markedly different retrospective on the Iraq War in an [open letter](#) to former President George W. Bush in the weekend edition of the British publication *Counterpunch*. Nader’s letter was his public reply to a solicitation he had received from the Bush Presidential Center for a monetary contribution to “help tell the story of the Bush Presidency” and of its “timeless principles and practical solutions to the challenges facing our world.”

“Did you mean,” Nader asked the former president, “the ‘timeless principles’ that drove you and Mr. Cheney to invade the country of Iraq which, contrary to your fabrications, deceptions and cover-ups, never threatened the United States?” Nor could Iraq, Nader wrote, have threatened “its far more powerful neighbors, even if the Iraqi regime wanted to do so.” Nader went on to charge Bush and his political allies with creating the devastation that continues to plague the Middle East nation.

Today, Iraq remains a country (roughly the size and population of Texas) you destroyed, a country where over a million Iraqis, including many children and infants (remember Fallujah?) lost their lives, millions more were sickened or injured, and millions more were forced to become refugees, including most of the Iraqi Christians. Iraq is a country rife with sectarian strife that your prolonged invasion provoked into what is now open warfare. Iraq is a country where al-Qaeda is spreading with explosions taking 20, 30, 40, 50 or 60 lives per day. Just this week, it was reported that the U.S. has sent Hellfire air-to-ground missiles to Iraq’s air force to be used against encampments of “the country’s branch of al-Qaeda.” There was no al-Qaeda in Iraq before your invasion. Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were mortal enemies.

Chances are McCain and Graham will find little support for their argument that America’s big mistake



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in its eight-year war in Iraq was getting out too soon rather than in starting the war in the first place. They seem to be faring no better as historians than they were as prophets.



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