



## Trump's Criticism of George W. Bush's War on Iraq Fuels Ongoing Arguments

Presidential candidate Donald Trump's continued condemnations of former President George W. Bush's (shown) decision to invade Iraq in 2003 have irritated many of his political opponents, including Bush's younger brother and Trump's rival for the Republican nomination, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. During the recent Republican candidates' debate in Greenville, South Carolina, Trump, in addition to calling the invasion of Iraq "a big fat mistake," responded to Jeb Bush's defense of his brother's record by reminding listeners that the 9/11 attacks had occurred while George W. was president.



The heated exchange was prompted by a question posed to Trump by moderator John Dickerson, who asked Trump about an interview he'd had back in 2008 with Wolf Blitzer. During that interview, they had discussed George W. Bush's conduct of the war in Iraq. Dickerson reminded Trump of a statement he'd made to Blitzer: that he was surprised that Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi hadn't tried to impeach him.

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Trump had told Blitzer at the time: "Which, personally, I think would have been a wonderful thing."

When Blitzer asked Trump what he had meant by that, Trump explained: "For the war, for the war, he lied, he got us into the war with lies."

When Dickerson asked Trump if he still believes that Bush should have been impeached, Trump answered:

Obviously, the war in Iraq was a big, fat mistake. All right? Now, you can take it any way you want, and it took — it took Jeb Bush, if you remember at the beginning of his announcement, when he announced for president, it took him five days.

He went back, it was a mistake, it wasn't a mistake. It took him five days before his people told him what to say, and he ultimately said, "It was a mistake." The war in Iraq, we spent \$2 trillion, thousands of lives, we don't even have it. Iran has taken over Iraq, with the second-largest oil reserves in the world.

Obviously, it was a mistake....

George Bush made a mistake. We can make mistakes. But that one was a beauty. We should have never been in Iraq. We have destabilized the Middle East....

You do whatever you want. You call it whatever you want. I want to tell you. They lied. They said there were weapons of mass destruction, there were none. And they knew there were none. There



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were no weapons of mass destruction.

Bush said of Trump's criticism of his brother's presidential policies: "I am sick and tired of him going after my family. My dad is the greatest man alive in my mind."

After the audience applauded, Bush continued: "And while Donald Trump was building a reality TV show, my brother was building a security apparatus to keep us safe. And I'm proud of what he did."

Whereupon Trump delivered his zinger: "The World Trade Center came down during your brother's reign, remember that."

Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) also jumped into the debate by defending former president Bush against Trump's charges, saying: "I thank God all the time it was George W. Bush in the White House on 9/11 and not Al Gore."

As Rubio continued he — perhaps unthinkingly — gave away a facet of our nation's invasion of Iraq that is rarely discussed: how our nation's submission to UN authority has a tendency to draw us into war after war, as happened in Korea and Vietnam (as part of SEATO). Rubio said:

And you can — I think you can look back in hindsight and say a couple of things, but [Bush] kept us safe. And not only did he keep us safe, but no matter what you want to say about weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein was *in violation of U.N. resolutions, in open violation*, and the world wouldn't do anything about it, and George W. Bush enforced what the international community refused to do. [Emphasis added.]

On December 19, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that Iraq was in "material breach" of Security Council resolution 1441, offering Iraq "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations" that had been set out in several previous resolutions. On September 12, 2002, Bush addressed the General Assembly and outlined a catalogue of complaints against the Iraqi government.

Under our Constitution, Congress is responsible for declaring war, and the president is responsible for serving as commander in chief of our military when we are engaged in such a war. There is no provision in the Constitution for our president to seek permission from the UN to defend our nation, nor to go to war without a declaration of war from Congress to enforce UN resolutions. This point was lost on members of the Bush administration, has subsequently been lost on members of the Obama administration, and is lost on Rubio, as well.

Trump countered Rubio's statement:

How did he keep us safe when the World Trade Center... I lost hundreds of friends. The World Trade Center came down during the reign of George Bush. He kept us safe? That is not safe. That is not safe, Marco. That is not safe.

Rubio countered by saying: "The World Trade Center came down because Bill Clinton didn't kill Osama bin Laden when he had the chance to kill him," after which Trump responded: "George Bush — by the way, George Bush had the chance, also, and he didn't listen to the advice of his C.I.A."

Regarding Rubio's assertion, the day before the 9/11 attacks, former President Clinton told a group of businessmen in Australia:

I nearly got [bin Laden]. And I could have killed him, but I would have to destroy a little town called Kandahar in Afghanistan and kill 300 innocent women and children, and then I would have been no better than him. And so I didn't do it.



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As for Trump's counter-charge about Bush, an opinion piece in the *New York Times* on September 10, 2012, "The Deafness Before the Storm," noted that several weeks before 9/11, on August 6, 2001, Bush had received a classified review of the threats posed by bin Laden and his terrorist network, al-Qaeda. Furthermore, noted the article, this was not the only such warning:

The direct warnings to Mr. Bush about the possibility of a Qaeda attack began in the spring of 2001. By May 1, the Central Intelligence Agency told the White House of a report that "a group presently in the United States" was planning a terrorist operation. Weeks later, on June 22, the daily brief reported that Qaeda strikes could be "imminent," although intelligence suggested the time frame was flexible.

The most significant point of this back-and-forth debate may not be speculation about who was responsible for 9/11 and whether or not our government could have prevented the attacks. We will never know that for certain. Of more significance is how these attacks were exploited to further an increasingly interventionist U.S. foreign policy and the creation of an invasive domestic spy network conducted by the NSA, following the passing of the PATRIOT Act, that has greatly undermined our Bill of Rights.

A discussion of the effects of our invasion of Iraq and the interventionist foreign policy that has continued ever since came up during a the CNN Republican presidential town hall in Columbia, South Carolina, on February 18. During that town hall, the moderator, Anderson Cooper, introduced an attendee named Orrin Smith, who asked Trump if he still stood by a statement he made about five years ago asserting that Bush had lied to get us into war in Iraq, noting that the statement had stung him very deeply.

Trump sidestepped the question somewhat and without saying that Bush had definitely lied, replied:

Let me ... tell you something. I'll tell you it very simply. It may have been the worst decision — going into Iraq may have been the worst decision anybody has made, any president has made in the history of this country. That's how bad it is, OK?

When the man, as well as Cooper, pressed him, he never did say definitively that Bush had lied. The closest he came was: "I don't know what he did. I just know it was a terrible mistake."

During his convoluted answer to the question, however, Trump touched on many of the devastating aftereffects resulting from the invasion. Among these was the ongoing crisis stemming from the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the turmoil in the Middle East and going to Europe. He referred to, "The migration that you see today, the destruction of Europe, with Angela Merkel allowing millions of people coming into Germany.... You look at Sweden, the other day — you look at Brussels — I was in Brussels years ago. It was one of the most beautiful — now it's like an armed camp. So crazy, what they've done."

Summing up his often-rambling recitation of the bad effects of our Iraqi invasion, Trump correctly noted:

The war in Iraq started the whole destabilization of the Middle East. It started ISIS. It started Libya. It started Syria. That was one of the worst decisions ever made by any government at any time.

Trump is obviously not afraid to criticize a Republican president if he believes such criticism is called for, which serves a valuable purpose in the current campaign. He has done a good job of slaying sacred



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cows and shaking up the party establishment.

However, this does not equate to being good presidential material. He lacks the depth of knowledge and consistency to put together a well-planned political program of the type previously offered by constitutionalists such as Senator Rand Paul, or former Representative Ron Paul, both of whose presidential campaigns never got off the ground.

The best the constitutionalist voter can hope for is that the party will offer a candidate in November who will do more to defend the Constitution than to dismantle it. If the GOP does not do this, the only alternative will be to build a more effective, constitutionalist Congress.

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