

## Misleading Rhetoric in 2004 State of the Union Address

by Stephen Zunes | January 21, 2004

As we gather tonight, hundreds of thousands of American servicemen and women are deployed across the world in the war on terror. By bringing hope to the oppressed and delivering justice to the violent, they are making America more secure.

Though no one should question the commitment and bravery of American servicemen and women, their missions of invading and occupying foreign countries and engaging in high altitude bombing and urban counterinsurgency operations that kill civilians has brought more fear than hope, delivered more violence than justice, and has created an unprecedented level of anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world and beyond that has actually made America less secure.

We have faced serious challenges together and now we face a choice: We can go forward with confidence and resolve or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us.

This assumes that those who believe that the Bush administration's policies are illegal, immoral, and counterproductive are living under illusions that deny the dangers from terrorists and despots. This rhetorical device ignores the many national security analysts and ordinary Americans who are fully aware of the forces arrayed against the United States yet believe the country must choose better means to protect itself than continuing the policies of the Bush administration.

The first to see our determination were the Taliban, who made Afghanistan the primary training base of al Qaeda killers. Businesses are opening, health care centers are being established, and the boys and girls of Afghanistan are back in school. With help from the new Afghan Army, our coalition is leading aggressive raids against surviving members of the Taliban and al Qaeda.

While life has improved markedly in the capital of Kabul, the vast majority of Afghanistan is under the grip of warlords, ethnic militias, opium magnates, and overall lawlessness. While women and girls are now legally able to attend school and go out of their houses unaccompanied, many are now too afraid to do so because of the breakdown of law and order.

Furthermore, the aggressive raids led by the United States are unfortunately not just against surviving members of the Taliban and al Qaeda, but often end up being against innocent villagers. Indeed, more Afghan civilians have been killed from U.S. bombing raids than American civilians were killed from the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Since we last met in this chamber, combat forces of the United States and other countries enforced the demands of the United Nations, ended the rule of Saddam Hussein, and the people of Iraq are free.

The United Nations did not demand an invasion of Iraq or an end to Saddam's regime. It demanded that the Iraqi government destroy its weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems and open up to intrusive inspections to confirm that it had done so. Iraq eventually came into compliance with these demands, allowing UN inspectors to return to conduct unimpeded inspections anywhere in the country in 2002 and apparently eliminating its WMDs and delivery systems some years earlier. An invasion was not necessary for Iraq to comply with the demands of the United Nations since it had already done so.

While the people of Iraq are free from Saddam Hussein's rule, they are not free. They are living under a foreign military occupation and the United States occupation authorities has thus far rejected popular demands by the Iraqis for direct elections to choose their own government.



---

Having broken the Baathist regime, we face a remnant of violent Saddam supporters. These killers, joined by foreign terrorists, are a serious, continuing danger. We are dealing with these thugs in Iraq, just as surely as we dealt with Saddam Hussein's evil regime.

While Baathists are apparently taking the dominant role leading the armed resistance to the U.S. occupation, increasing numbers of Iraqis fighting U.S. forces are not supporters of the former regime, but are non-Baathist nationalists who resent their country being controlled by a foreign army. If U.S. forces were simply battling remnants of the old regime and some foreign supporters, it would largely be a mopping up operation where attacks would be decreasing over time. Instead, the resistance has been growing. While those planting bombs in crowded civilian areas are undeniably thugs and terrorists, the vast majority of attacks are against uniformed foreign occupation forces which, while most unfortunate, are generally recognized as legitimate acts of resistance under international law.

Today our coalition is working with the Iraqi Governing Council to draft a basic law, with a bill of rights. We are working with Iraqis and the United Nations to prepare for a transition to full Iraqi sovereignty by the end of June.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration and its handpicked Iraqi Governing Council are trying to set up a government through regional caucuses that they can control, rejecting popular demands for direct elections. Under this system and with U.S. occupation forces remaining in the country, it would be a stretch to consider the establishment of such a government full Iraqi sovereignty. The United Nations has thus far been understandably reluctant to support the establishment of what many would see as a puppet regime.

As democracy takes hold in Iraq, the enemies of freedom will do all in their power to spread violence and fear. They are trying to shake the will of our country and our friends, but the United States of America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. The killers will fail, and the Iraqi people will live in freedom.

By defining the U.S. occupation as democracy and those who are fighting the occupation as enemies of freedom who are trying to shake the will of our country, President Bush is trying to make Americans and others who are calling for a U.S. withdrawal appear to be unprincipled cowards.

Last month, the leader of Libya voluntarily pledged to disclose and dismantle all of his regime's weapons of mass destruction programs, including a uranium enrichment project for nuclear weapons. Nine months of intense negotiations involving the United States and Great Britain succeeded with Libya, while 12 years of diplomacy with Iraq did not. And one reason is clear: For diplomacy to be effective, words must be credible and no one can now doubt the word of America.

This is misleading on several counts. First of all, Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs had been well-developed, whereas Libya's WMD efforts were in their infancy. Secondly, there was no direct diplomacy between the United States and Iraq in the twelve years prior to the invasion: there were sanctions, threats, and air strikes. Most importantly, the implication that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was what led Libya to give up its program flies in the face of logic: Not only did Iraq give up its WMD programs through United Nations efforts prior to the U.S. invasion, but despite dismantling its weapons and opening up to inspections the United States invaded anyway.

Let us be candid about the consequences of leaving Saddam in power. Already the Kay Report identified dozens of weapons of mass destruction-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations. Had we failed to act, the dictator's weapons of mass destruction programs would continue to this day.

Last year, President Bush falsely claimed Iraq had large stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. At most, all he can claim now is that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction-related program activities. These were virtually all legal and inconsequential remnants of old programs, not new WMD programs starting

---

up again that posed a potential threat. With strict sanctions remaining in place against the importation of military equipment, dual use technologies, and raw materials to Iraq that could be used for WMD development (which, unlike the economic sanctions, were strongly supported worldwide) it is hard to imagine how Saddam Hussein could have ever restarted his WMD programs.

Had we failed to act, Security Council resolutions on Iraq would have been revealed as empty threats, weakening the United Nations and encouraging defiance by dictators around the world.

Not only does it appear that Iraq was apparently in compliance with UN Security Council resolutions at the time of the U.S. invasion, there are more than ninety UN Security Council resolutions currently being violated by countries other than Iraq, the vast majority by governments supported by the Bush administration. U.S. policy has done far more than Saddam Hussein in weakening the authority of the United Nations.

The world without Saddam Hussein's regime is a better and safer place.

Putting aside the fact that previous Republican administrations helped keep the regime in power during the 1980s (its most dangerous and repressive period), many of Iraq's neighbors and independent strategic analysts believe that a weak and disarmed Iraqi regime even under Saddam's oppressive rule represented a better and safer environment than the current situation, where Iraq is torn by guerrilla warfare, terrorist attacks, separatist movements, and a rising tide of Islamic extremism.

Some critics have said our duties in Iraq must be internationalized. This particular criticism is hard to explain to our partners in Britain, Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Italy, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Hungary, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania, the Netherlands, Norway, El Salvador, and the 17 other countries that have committed troops to Iraq.

Despite some notable exceptions, most of the 34 countries contributing to the U.S. occupation have

sent only very small and highly specialized units (such as medical teams or construction workers) and have done so only under diplomatic pressure and financial incentives. Americans make up over 85% of the occupation forces and have control over virtually all of the political, military, and reconstruction operations by these other countries. By contrast, most of those who are calling for internationalizing the operations in Iraq are advocating placing Iraq under a United Nations trusteeship similar to that which guided East Timor to independence following the 1999 Indonesian withdrawal.

From the beginning, America has sought international support for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have gained much support. There is a difference, however, between leading a coalition of many nations, and submitting to the objections of a few. America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our people.

In reality, it was not a few nations, but an overwhelming majority of the world's nations that opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, public opinion polls show that even in countries whose governments did support the U.S. invasion, the majority of these countries' populations opposed it. It is highly unlikely that there would be any opposition in the United Nations Security Council or anywhere else for the U.S. government to defend the security of our people. The invasion of Iraq, however, was not about defending the security of the American people but an illegal act of aggression, according to the United Nations Charter, which has been signed and ratified by the United States and virtually every country in the world.

As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny, despair, and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friends.

The unfortunate reality is that the United States is not pursuing a strategy of freedom, but continues to be the primary military, financial, and diplomatic

---

supporter of the majority of tyrannical regimes in the Middle East. The United States supplies the equipment and training for internal security forces for dictatorial governments in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Uzbekistan that crush popular movements for reform as well as providing the military equipment for occupation armies that suppress movements for national self-determination from Western Sahara to the West Bank.

Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we understand our special calling: This great republic will lead the cause of freedom.

No country has given more military and economic support to more dictatorships and occupation armies in the Middle East and in the world as a whole than has the United States. The monetary value of U.S. military aid to Middle Eastern countries is six times our economic aid. The top commercial export from the United States to the Middle East is not consumer items, high technology, or foodstuffs but armaments. Virtually all the recipients of such weaponry are governments that engage in gross and systematic human rights abuses. Unfortunately, U.S. policy has little to do with peace or freedom.

Perhaps even more disheartening than these misleading statements by President Bush during his State of the Union address is that, in their formal responses to Bush's speech, Democratic congressional leaders Nancy Pelosi and Tom Daschle failed to challenge them other than a vague appeal for stronger diplomatic efforts. None of the analysts on the major networks challenged these misleading statements either. Meanwhile, the two Democratic presidential contenders who dominated the Iowa caucuses the previous evening were senators who have largely supported Bush administration policy in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

President Bush can get away with such misleading rhetoric because he knows the mainstream media and the Democratic Party will allow him to do so. Unless the American public demands greater accountability from the news media and the Democratic Party leadership, George W. Bush will have four more opportunities to make similar State of the Union speeches.

---

*(Stephen Zunes is an associate professor of Politics and chair of the Peace & Justice Studies Program at the University of San Francisco. He serves as Middle East editor for Foreign Policy in Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)) and the author of *Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism* (online at [www.commoncouragepress.com](http://www.commoncouragepress.com).)*

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©2004. All rights reserved.

## Foreign Policy In Focus

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

### Recommended citation:

Stephen Zunes, "Misleading Rhetoric in 2004 State of the Union Address," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, January 21, 2004).

### Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2004/0401souann.html>

### Production Information:

Writer: Stephen Zunes

Editor: Tom Barry, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

**p. 4**

---

**www.fpif.org**

A Think Tank Without Walls

