

# Biden and Other Democrats Helped Colin Powell Spread George W. Bush's Iraq Lies

**Leading Democrats continue to side with the GOP on foreign policy rationalized through demonstrably false statements.**

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Published October 19, 2021



While the death of former Secretary of State and retired Gen. Colin Powell has elicited praise-filled eulogies in the mainstream media and officials in Washington, many Americans still carry bitter feelings over Powell's support for the illegal, unnecessary and predictably disastrous war in Iraq. In particular, critics cite his February 2003 speech before the United Nations Security Council in which he put forward a litany of demonstrably false statements in making the case that Iraq had compiled a dangerous arsenal of "weapons of mass destruction" and was actively supporting the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

In light of the negative reaction from the arms control community and other knowledgeable sources, as well as many of the United States' European allies and others, Powell's speech would not have had anything close to the war-justifying impact it did were it not for efforts by prominent Democrats — including then-Sen. Joe Biden — to defend him.

Virtually all of the accusations that Powell put forward in his nationally televised speech were [based upon the word of anonymous sources](#). His interpretation of the fuzzy photos he displayed were similarly unconvincing. Despite years of spy satellites and aerial surveillance combing that largely-desert country, no evidence of ongoing chemical, biological or nuclear weapons activity had been spotted, nor were any of the proscribed missiles and other weapons systems. In addition, United Nations inspectors, who had been given unfettered access to suspect sites throughout Iraq since late the previous year, had visited suspect sites and had found nothing. So while his speech was eloquent, Powell fell far short of proving that Iraq had anything that could seriously threaten the security of its neighbors, much less the United States.

Powell's remarks were widely dismissed in the international community. The Security Council rejected his calls to authorize an invasion of that oil-rich country. Hans Blix, executive chairman of the United Nations Monitoring and Verification Commission (UNMOVIC), categorically rejected many of Powell's claims. For example, the respected Swedish diplomat insisted that there was absolutely no evidence to back Powell's claims of mobile biological weapons laboratories, of Iraq trying to foil inspectors by moving equipment before his teams arrived, or that his organization has been infiltrated by Iraqi spies, later noting how UNMOVIC had not "found evidence of the continuation or resumption of proscribed items."

The weakest part of Powell's presentation was his effort to link the decidedly secular Iraqi regime with the fundamentalist al-Qaeda, whose leader Osama bin Laden had referred to Saddam Hussein as "an apostate, an infidel, and a traitor to Islam." Reports cited by Powell attempting to link Hussein to affiliated groups like Ansar al-Islam came almost exclusively from anti-Hussein Iraqis in exile hoping that establishing such a link could

encourage U.S. military action to oust the dictator. Indeed, Ansar al-Islam's stated goal was to overthrow the secular Baathist regime in Baghdad and replace it with an Islamic state.

The efforts to tie al-Qaeda figure Abu Musab Al Zarqawi to the Iraqi regime were also based largely on unattributed sources. Ansar al-Islam fighters and their al-Qaeda supporters had been seen only in autonomous Kurdish areas beyond Iraqi government control. (Indeed, Powell's claim that there had been "decades" of contact between Hussein and al-Qaeda was particularly odd, given that the terrorist network was less than 10 years old at that point.) Furthermore, none of the September 11 hijackers were Iraqi, none of al-Qaeda's leaders have been Iraqi and none of the money trail has ever been traced to Iraq.

[Subsequent reports](#) indicate that Powell himself didn't even believe what he was saying, but saw himself obliged as a "good soldier" to obey the commands of his commander-in-chief.

Despite the lack of compelling evidence and the ridicule the claims made in the speech received from knowledgeable observers, leading Democrats rushed in to defend Powell in the face of his transparently false claims.

For example, Sen. [Joe Biden](#) who, as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, served as the Democrats de facto foreign policy spokesperson, insisted that Powell's testimony was "very powerful and I think irrefutable," telling Powell, "I am proud to be associated with you." *The Washington Post* highlighted Biden's statement in an editorial praising Powell's speech, which it titled as a nod to Biden's statement, "[Irrefutable.](#)"

Even though Iraq had already disarmed itself from its proscribed weapons and weapons systems and had eliminated its weapons programs years earlier, [Nancy Pelosi](#) was inspired by Powell's speech to reiterate the lie that Iraq had not done so, saying, "The case for disarming Saddam Hussein is strong and well known, and Secretary Powell reiterated that case today."

[Susan Rice](#), who held senior positions in the Clinton and Obama administrations (and is currently serving in the Biden administration), insisted that Powell "has proved that Iraq has these weapons and is hiding them, and I don't think many informed people doubted that," a particularly ironic statement given the strong doubts among arms control community, including those within the U.S. government, such as the [State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and within the CIA itself](#), which questioned claims about Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs and delivery systems.

Senators [John Kerry](#) and Hillary Clinton — both future Democratic presidential nominees and secretaries of state, along with then-Democratic House leader [Dick Gephardt](#) — insisted that Powell's testimony was "compelling," as did [Sen. Maria Cantwell](#), who also stated that Powell had made a strong case that the isolated and disarmed country suffering under the toughest sanctions in world history was somehow a "serious threat to global stability."

Rep. Ed Markey, now a U.S. senator, insisted that Powell had made a case "as well as it can be made." Sen. [Joe Lieberman](#), the 2000 Democratic vice-presidential nominee, claimed that Powell had made a "compelling, convincing, and chilling case." Sen. [John Edwards](#), the subsequent Democratic vice-presidential nominee, claimed that, "Powell made a powerful case before the United Nations," and that Saddam Hussein constituted a "grave threat."

[Sen. Dianne Feinstein](#) said Powell's testimony convinced her that "I don't know that there's any other solution" than war. Similarly, [Kerry](#) used Powell's speech to push the United Nations to grant the United States the authority to invade Iraq, saying, "With such strong evidence in front of them, it is now incumbent on the U.N. to

respect its own mandates.” Senate Democratic leader [Harry Reid](#) also insisted that Powell had made a convincing case for war, though he later admitted that he was “sucked in by General Powell,” and regretted believing him over more credible sources.

It is unclear as to why so many leading Democrats would have rushed to defend what virtually all knowledgeable observers saw as a transparently weak case for war. One possible reason is that they figured that if the United States invaded Iraq only to find there were no biological or chemical weapons, no nuclear program, no offensive weapons systems and no ties to al-Qaeda, they could simply blame the Bush administration or “faulty intelligence” and not suffer the political consequences. Indeed, the Democrats who praised Powell’s speech were almost all easily reelected to Congress, even after they acknowledged that Powell’s statements were untrue, while Kerry, Clinton and Biden all later received the Democratic Party’s nomination for president.

To this day, leading Democrats continue to side with Republicans on the [Israeli](#) and [Moroccan](#) occupations, [increased military spending](#), [support for dictatorial regimes](#), and [attacks on the United Nations](#), the [International Criminal Court](#) and the [International Court of Justice](#), as well as other controversial foreign policy positions rationalized through demonstrably false statements. As long as Democrats can defend Republican lies without suffering any consequences from their constituents, they have little incentive to do otherwise. ###