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DENIAL AND DECEPTION

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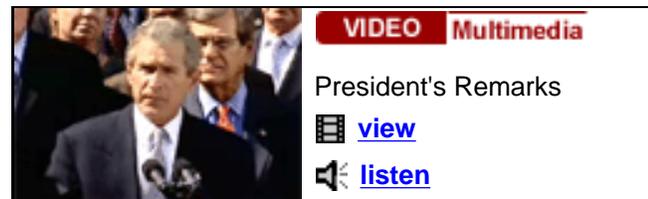
President, House Leadership Agree on Iraq Resolution

The Rose Garden

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1:15 P.M. EDT



THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming. Today I'm joined by leaders of the House and the Senate from both political parties to show our unity of purpose in confronting a gathering threat to the security of America and to the future of peace.

I want to thank in particular Speaker Hastert, and Leader Gephardt, Leader Lott, for the tremendous work in building bipartisan support on this vital issue. I also want to thank Senators Warner, Lieberman, McCain, and Bayh for introducing this resolution which we've agreed to on the floor of the Senate this morning.

The text of our bipartisan resolution is clear and it is strong. The statement of support from the Congress will show to friend and enemy alike the resolve of the United States. In Baghdad, the regime will know that full compliance with all U.N. Security demands is the only choice, and that time remaining for that choice is limited.

On its present course, the Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency. We know the treacherous history of the regime. It has waged a war against its neighbors; it has sponsored and sheltered terrorists; it has developed weapons of mass death; it has used them against innocent men, women and children. We know the designs of the Iraqi regime. In defiance of pledges to the U.N., it has stockpiled biological and chemical weapons. It is rebuilding the facilities used to make those weapons.

U.N. inspectors believe that Iraq could have produce enough biological and chemical agent to kill millions of people. The regime has the scientists and facilities to build nuclear weapons, and is seeking the materials needed to do so.

We know the methods of this regime. They buy time with hollow promises. They move incriminating evidence to stay ahead of inspectors. They concede just enough to escape -- to escape punishment, and then violate every pledge when the attention of the world is turned away.

We also know the nature of Iraq's dictator. On his orders, opponents have been decapitated and their heads displayed outside their homes. Women have been systematically raped as a method of intimidation. Political prisoners are made to watch their own children being tortured. The dictator is a student of Stalin, using murder as a tool of terror and control within his own cabinet, within his own army, even within his own family. We will not leave the future of peace and the security of America in the hands of this cruel and dangerous man.

None of us here today desire to see military conflict, because we know the awful nature of war. Our country values life, and never seeks war unless it is essential to security and to justice. America's leadership and willingness to use force, confirmed by the Congress, is the best way to ensure compliance and avoid conflict. Saddam must disarm, period. If, however, he chooses to do otherwise, if he persists in his defiance, the use of force may become unavoidable.

The course of action may bring many sacrifices. Yet delay, indecision and inaction could lead to a massive and sudden horror. By timely and resolute action, we can defend ourselves and shape a peaceful future. Together with the Congress, I will do everything necessary to protect and defend our country.

In accepting this responsibility, we also serve the interests and the hopes of the Iraqi people. They are a great and gifted people, with an ancient and admirable culture, and they would not choose to be ruled by violence and terror. The people of Iraq are the daily victims of Saddam Hussein's oppression. They will be the first to benefit when the world's demands are met. Americans believe all men and women deserve to be free. And as we saw in the fall of the Taliban, men and women celebrate freedom's arrival.

The United States will work with other nations. We'll work with other nations to bring Saddam to account. We'll work with other nations to help the Iraqi people form a just government and a unified country. And should force be required, the United States will help rebuild a liberated Iraq.

Countering Iraq's threat is also a central commitment on the war on terror. We know Saddam Hussein has longstanding and ongoing ties to international terrorists. With the support and shelter of a regime, terror groups become far more lethal. Aided by a terrorist network, an outlaw regime can launch attacks while concealing its involvement. Even a dictator is not suicidal, but he can make use of men who are. We must confront both terror cells and terror states, because they are different faces of the same evil.

I brought this issue to the attention of the world, and many, many countries share our determination to confront this threat. We're not alone. The issue is now before the United States Congress. This debate will be closely watched by the American people, and this debate will be remembered in history. We didn't ask for this challenge as a country, but we will face it, and we will face it together.

As the vote nears, I urge all members of Congress to consider this resolution with the greatest of care. The choice before them could not be more consequential. I'm confident that members of both parties will choose wisely.

I appreciate members of Congress who are willing to address you all, starting with the Speaker of the House, Denny Hastert.

SPEAKER HASTERT: Thank you, Mr. President. This is a bipartisan agreement. The White House deserves credit for working with Republicans and Democrats to achieve this historic resolution. The resolution does not tie the President's hands, it gives him flexibility he needs to get the job done. This resolution does not require

the President to get United Nations approval before proceeding. It supports the President's effort to work with the United Nations, but it doesn't require him to seek U.N. approval first. If the President determines that he has to act unilaterally to protect American people, he can, and he has the ability to do that.

I think the bottom line for all of us here is, we've been through this process, we've been through September 11th. We visited Ground Zero. We've been at the Pentagon the day after. And we don't want that type of tragedy to happen in this country again. And we will do everything in our power to prevent it from happening again.

REPRESENTATIVE GEPHARDT: Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that the most important issue the President and the Congress ever address is that of life and death. The first responsibility of our government is to protect the security of our nation and our citizens.

In our view, Iraq's use and continuing development of weapons of mass destruction, combined with efforts of terrorists to acquire such weapons, pose a unique and dangerous threat to our national security. Many of us believe that we need to deal with this threat diplomatically if we can, militarily if we must.

Every member of Congress must make their own decision on the level of threat posed by Iraq and what to do to respond to that threat. I've said many times to my caucus that each member should be guided by his or her own conscience, free from others trying to politicize the issue or questioning others' motives.

In response to the President's desire for congressional support and, in keeping with our constitutional responsibilities, I have worked to draft a resolution that reflects the views of a large bipartisan segment of Congress. My underlying goal in this process has been to ensure that Iraq is disarmed, and to lessen the likelihood that weapons of mass destruction can be passed to terrorists.

Over the past several days, I have solicited views from all the members of my caucus and have negotiated with the administration to secure a number of important improvements that reflect these views. These improvements include: support for and prioritization of U.S. diplomatic efforts at the United Nations; limitations on the scope of the authorization; presidential determinations to Congress before our Armed Forces may be used against Iraq. These include assurances by the President that he has exhausted diplomatic means to address this threat, and that any military action against Iraq will not undermine our ongoing efforts in the war against terrorism. Regular consultations with, and reporting to Congress on the administration's efforts to address this threat and post-conflict contingencies in Iraq.

You all know that we have a lot of differences on many issues. We disagree on many domestic issues. But this is the most important thing that we do. This should not be about politics. We have to do what is right for the security of our nation and the safety of all Americans.

We're about to begin a great debate in the United States Congress. Part of the majesty of our democratic achievement of a democratic governance is that on issues of war and peace, life and death, we have entrusted those decisions not just to the President, but to the Congress as a co-equal branch of this government. We now take that solemn obligation, and I believe that when the debate is finished, we will have discharged that responsibility in the highest tradition of this country and our great people.

SENATOR WARNER: Mr. President, colleagues, America has always led in the cause of freedom. And now, in this century, this resolution marks, I think, the most significant step in fulfilling America's history in carrying out our responsibilities.

Mr. President, to you, and to Prime Minister Blair who has joined you, great, great gratitude is owed not only by the people of the United States, but by the people of the world, for your efforts to bring to the forefront this issue, and to put it squarely on the United Nations to fulfill their responsibilities, and to call upon the Congress for their support.

We do that here today, Mr. President. And I'm very privileged to stand here with leaders -- Senator Lott, Senator Lieberman, Senator McCain -- that led the '91 effort in that resolution. Mr. President, we delivered for your father. We will deliver for you. And I predict, while the vote was a margin of five in '91, it will be a stronger bipartisan margin this time.

And as the Congress closed the ranks behind that historic debate in '91, so will the Congress close its ranks such that this nation can speak with one voice, the Congress and our President united. Thank you, sir.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: There is no more fateful, important, or difficult responsibility that the Constitution gives members of Congress than to decide when, whether, and how to authorize the President as Commander-in-Chief to go to war. Mr. President, in your eloquent, powerful, and convincing statement this morning, you have reminded us, and I believe the American people, about why this is such a circumstance.

I have felt for more than a decade now that every additional day that Saddam Hussein is in power in Iraq is an additional day of danger for the Iraqi people, for his neighbors in the region, particularly for the people and military of the United States of America, and indeed for the people of the world. And that is why I am grateful for the opportunity to stand with my colleagues from both parties, and both Houses, and with you, Mr. President, in offering this resolution to authorize you to take military action to protect the region and the world from Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and to enforce the resolutions that are relevant of the United Nations.

There are those who say that this represents hurried or precipitous action, that we should give Saddam and the Iraqi government another chance. The record shows that for the last 10 years, we have tried -- the world has tried -- in just about every way -- diplomatic, economic and otherwise, except military, in the end -- to convince Saddam Hussein to live by the rules of international law and civilization. They've not worked.

The moment of truth has arrived. For Saddam Hussein, this is his last chance, and the best chance for the international community to come together behind the rule of law, and to show that resolutions of the United Nations are worth more than the paper that they are written on.

I am truly hopeful that the broad bipartisan support that I see here today behind you, Mr. President, as our Commander-in-Chief, will strengthen the work of your Secretary of State and your administration at the United Nations. I am convinced, as impressive as this group is here today, though there will be a serious debate ahead in both Houses of Congress, and amendments will certainly be offered in the Senate -- as is the right and responsibility of those who disagree with this amendment -- that in the end, those who disagree with this resolution -- in the end, this resolution will pass in the Senate with a very large, bipartisan majority.

And that, today, is the best hope for a stronger America and for a life for the American people that is safer.

Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR MCCAIN: I'd like to thank the President for his leadership in addressing a challenge that many of

us believe should have been addressed at least four years ago. I'd like to thank Speaker Hastert, Leader Gephardt, Senator Lott for their leadership and the efforts they've made to bring this issue to the Congress and to the American people.

I'd like to also thank my friends, Senator Lieberman, Senator Warner, and Senator Bayh. Because of their efforts, there's now identical resolutions in both Houses of Congress. They will be debated, they will be discussed, and I believe the American people and the Congress will be enlightened, educated, and better off for having a debate that I know will be respectful of the views of all members of Congress.

The Constitution of the United States designates the President of the United States as Commander-in-Chief. The Congress of the United States plays a role, and I believe that this process we are about to embark on is the appropriate role that Congress should carry out its responsibilities. But at the end of the day, the final, most serious responsibility of sending young American men and women into harm's way rests with the President of the United States. And I am convinced that an overwhelming, significant majority of both Houses of Congress, speaking for their constituents, will provide the President of the United States with the endorsement and the support that he needs, if necessary, as a last resort, to preserve America's security by a regime change in Iraq. I thank him for his leadership.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming.

END 1:34 P.M. EDT

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