**Excerpt from: The War in Iraq**

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Why did the U.S. invade Iraq in 2003?

The roots of the War in Iraq go back to the first Gulf War. Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait in 1990, but a U.S.-led coalition forced Saddam Hussein’s army out of the country in 1991. The U.N. resolution that ended the war forbade Iraq from possessing or producing chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. Saddam refused to give U.N. weapons inspectors free access, however. For the next 12 years, world leaders worried about the possibility that Saddam was developing, or had already produced, these weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

President George W. Bush and members of his inner circle focused closely on Saddam after 9/11. Saddam himself alternately denied that he had WMDs and gave the impression that he really did have them. (Shortly before his execution, he told an F.B.I. interviewer that he’d done this to prevent Iran from seeing him as weak and vulnerable: see the Washington Post article for more on these interviews.)

President Bush insisted that Saddam posed a threat to the security of the U.S. and the Middle East. In a televised address in 2003, he gave Saddam an ultimatum: leave Iraq or the U.S. military will attack Iraq and remove you. He claimed to have hard evidence that Saddam possessed WMDs, and that Iraq had aided, trained and harbored al-Qaeda terrorists. In order to pre-empt a future terrorist attack using chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, the president said, the U.S. had the right to defend itself by removing the threat.

On March 20, 2003, American armed forces invaded Iraq. President Bush declared victory on May 1.

After toppling Saddam’s government, U.S. investigators found no evidence of WMDs, and concluded that Iraq had stopped developing these weapons in 1991. No evidence for an Iraq/al-Qaeda connection ever surfaced, either; Saddam himself, in the F.B.I. interviews mentioned above, denounced Osama bin-Laden and denied having any dealings with al-Qaeda.

Other justifications for the invasion offered by the Bush administration included Saddam’s history of human rights abuses, his support for terrorist groups (he paid rewards to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers), and the chance to bring democracy to Iraq.