

## “On Behalf of American Principles”

**Participant:** Condoleezza Rice

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**Project:** George W. Bush Oral History Project

Condoleezza Rice served as George W. Bush’s national security advisor during his first term as president. After the Bush administration decided to remove Iraqi president Saddam Hussein from power in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, they debated what type of government should replace him. Rice details the debate in the U.S. National Security Council and President Bush’s response.

**Condoleezza Rice:** We did not go to Iraq to deliver democracy in Iraq; that was not the purpose, any more than [Franklin D.] Roosevelt went to war against Hitler to make Germany democratic. Once we had decided that, for security reasons, national security, we had to take out Saddam Hussein—He was 12 years in violation of Security Council resolutions. He was shooting at our aircraft on a practically daily basis in the no-fly zones. He was breaking out of the sanctions because of the Oil-for-Food scandal. He was, we thought, rebuilding rapidly his weapons of mass destruction. He had already built his chemical and biological capability, and was working on nuclear capability. He had attacked his neighbors occupying Kuwait and dragged us into war twice. He was the most violent factor in the Middle East. Once we decided that this security circumstance we couldn’t continue—once we decided we had to use American military power to dislodge him if necessary—we had to have a view about what came after.

We actually had a debate in the National Security Council about whether the goal should be a democratic Iraq or just another strongman. At the end of listening to his folks go around about this—and it’s kind of funny because it wasn’t that anybody was particularly— This was more kind of Socratic questions: “Well, if we did a strongman—” It wasn’t that Don said, “We need a strongman,” and the Vice President said, “No, we don’t.” It wasn’t like that. But as we got to the end of this discussion, the President said, “If American men and women are going to war, they’re going to war on behalf of American principles, not against them.”

*End of excerpt.*

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URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/condoleezza-rice-oral-history>