

Congresswoman Maxine Waters' Speech On The Special Order Regarding Possible War In Iraq

Washington, DC— On Tuesday, March 18, Congresswoman Maxine Waters delivered the following speech on the pending war in Iraq:

Mr. Speaker, to the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Cummings), I want to thank him for taking time out in the schedule of the Congress of the United States to allow the members of the Congressional Black Caucus to take the floor to talk about our concerns and to describe our feelings about the preemptive strike that we are poised to carry out as we stand here tonight.

I thank the Chairman because he knows and I know that we are going to be criticized. We are going to be criticized, and there will be those who even call us unpatriotic. We will be criticized. We will be called unpatriotic, and there will be an attempt to intimidate us and say to us that at this point in time we should not raise these questions, we should not talk about our deep feelings and our concerns, we should only support whatever the President is doing.

But I would like to remind those who would criticize us that we are indeed patriotic Americans. As a matter of fact, if we take a look at the history of African Americans in this country, one can only conclude that we are indeed patriotic. We believe in America. We believe in America despite the history of America as it relates to African Americans, despite slavery, despite discrimination, without racism. We stand by America. We have decided that it is our job and our responsibility to make America the kind of place that America can be and it should be, and so we take this floor this evening to try to raise the question how did we get to the point where the President of the United States is issuing an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein in Iraq to be out of that country within 48 hours, he and his sons, or face the consequences of a preemptive strike? How did we get to this point? How did we get to the point where all diplomatic efforts have been abandoned? How did we get to the point where we have some 250,000 to 300,000 young men and women in Kuwait, in Qatar and on the sea awaiting the order to strike? Where did it all break down? How did we lose our allies? What made France and Russia and Germany and even China decide that they could not stand with the President of the United States in a second resolution? What made France say no matter what, they were poised to veto any resolution being described in the way the President of the United States was describing the second resolution?

When we ask the question of how, when, and where did the diplomatic efforts fail, we cannot help but understand that the diplomatic efforts could not work because the case has not been made for preemptive strike. The case has not been made, and there is no documentation as of this date that even Saddam Hussein is harboring weapons of mass

destruction.

As we have sent our inspectors there, they have found some things; but we have also discovered that some things that were supposedly in place in Iraq were not in place. We listened very carefully as our Secretary of State described sheds and operations where weapons were being developed only to discover that they were old and dilapidated, full of dust with no electricity. As there was an attempt to document why we had to have this preemptive strike, we found each day that the representations were less than factual. As a matter of fact, our own intelligence community headed by the CIA said that they could not find in Iraq that which was being described by our own Secretary of State, the President of the United States.

Some would say the President moved on this preemptive strike after 9 11, the President was so concerned about terrorism and 9 11 that he decided that he must take some action.

The President of the United States of America had the support of this Congress to take action to find the terrorists, to bring them to the bar of justice. We said yes, Mr. President, 9 11 is a terrible thing. It was a terrible thing. We should not be the victims of terrorism, and we should find those who are responsible. We were told that Osama bin Laden and others were responsible. And we said, we support you, Mr. President. Let us go after Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar and any of the rest of those leaders leading al Qaeda that were responsible for terrorism.

We are still looking for Osama bin Laden. Where is he, Mr. President? We still do not have Mullah Omar, supposedly one of the high operatives responsible for terrorism. Mr. President, not only do we support finding the terrorists, you have taken a lot of steps above and beyond what some of us even thought should be taken when you moved to change the Constitution of the United States to try to locate folks that supposedly were responsible. You have locked up people. Some of them we still do not know where they are. You have brought folks who still have not been identified with terrorism but are being held, but we have not had a breakthrough. We have not had a breakthrough, and we are worried that the war on terrorism has taken a back seat to a preemptive strike on Saddam Hussein.

Mr. President, you cannot substitute a preemptive strike on Saddam Hussein for finding the terrorists. We want the terrorists to be found. We give you all the support that you need to do that. And, Mr. President, we want the homeland secured. We have given you all the support that you need for homeland security, but we find as of today the terrorists have not been located. Some of our airports are still exposed. We have nuclear power plants that are exposed. We have ports where we have containers that are still coming in that are not inspected; and as of this day, not all of the baggage that goes into the belly of the airplanes that are traveling throughout this country is inspected.

Mr. President, we want to find the terrorists. We want to secure the homeland. We are worried that you have been diverted, that you are about to do this preemptive strike without the documentation.

Yes, we know that Saddam Hussein has done some terrible things. We have been successful in containing him. I do not think that he presents us nearly as much of a problem as North Korea. If we take a look at Kim Jong Il in North Korea, we find that not only has he developed nuclear capability, he has opted out of the nuclear proliferation treaty. He has decided to test missiles.

He has challenged us. He has interfered with our airplanes in the sky. What are you going to do about Kim Jong Il? And on top of that, we now discover that Iran has plutonium that could be developed into nuclear capability for weapons of war.

Mr. President, something is wrong with this picture. What is wrong with this picture is this: we are sophisticated enough to know that some of our allies, Pakistan, have nuclear capability and so does India and they could go at each other any day of the week. We also know that Israel has nuclear capability. We also understand that Russia still has nuclear capability. There is too much nuclear capability in the world to talk about focusing our sights on Iraq that still does not have nuclear capability, and we still have not found the weapons of mass destruction.

I know that Saddam Hussein is clever and of course he has been cooperating. The more we push him against the wall, the more he cooperates. Yes, we can now send our planes and we can do the surveillance. Yes, he is now dismantling the Samoud missiles. Yes, he continues to cooperate as we push him against the wall, and the more he cooperates, the more our allies and others say let us continue to do the inspections, let us see if there are weapons of mass destruction. We should not stop in the middle of these inspections.

But there are those who say all of this talk is too late, that you have decided, Mr. President, that it is just a matter of time after issuing the ultimatum that we will move. I am naive enough to believe, I have enough hope, that even at this late date, you have identified that we will move at a time of our choice, that that time will not come. I still hope despite the billions of dollars that we have spent deploying these soldiers that we will bring them home.

We love our soldiers. We support them and we embrace them. Our hearts are torn apart as we see these families torn apart, mothers and fathers leaving the babies. We watched this in the Gulf war only to find that our soldiers came home, many of them had no apartments. They had no homes. They had no furniture. We do not want to replay this. Yes, every country should be able to defend itself, but we are in no danger from Iraq. As a matter of fact, that is probably one of the weakest points on the globe for us to attack. We are not threatened by Saddam Hussein.

Mr. President, I hope that you do not think that with this preemptive strike that somehow this will translate into we have a war on terrorism. It does not. We know the difference, Mr. President. Striking Saddam, striking Iraq is not fighting terrorism. What about our friends in Saudi Arabia who pay for the madrasas and the schools where right wing fundamentalism is taught? Those madrasas are the breeding grounds for the al Qaeda

operation, but, no, they are our friends. We are tied to them because of oil. They are not a democracy. The House of Saud is but a very rich family that has been able to manipulate its way into a friendship and a relationship despite the fact the support and the money comes from Saudi Arabia. The terrorists, all of whom have been identified with 9 11, all were born, bred in Saudi Arabia. Our friends that we have aligned ourselves within Pakistan as we have moved into Afghanistan turn out to be those who are supplying North Korea with some of the plutonium and the nuclear capability that they are developing. It does not add up, Mr. President.

What we see and we are witnessing is the mismanagement of America. Someone today criticized Senator Daschle because he talked about the diplomatic disaster. Mr. President, it is a diplomatic disaster. We are watching before our very eyes the mismanagement of our beloved country. Our schools are falling apart. You said you wished to leave no child behind, but, Mr. President, you have not funded assistance to education that will have our children in the best possible situations where they can learn. Our health care system has fallen apart. In my city, in my county we are closing healthcare clinics. We are closing hospitals. And the stock market has not performed since before 9 11.

What are you doing to stimulate this economy? Mr. President, I do not think the average person will believe that by eliminating the taxes on dividends that somehow it is going to stimulate this economy.

Mr. President, you are not able to tell us what this war is going to cost and what the cleanup, what the revitalization, the reconstruction of Iraq is going to cost. The American people need to know where our dollars are going. The American people need to understand the cost of this war and why.

Mr. President, the worst thing that could happen to us is that you have this preemptive strike, you go into Iraq, occupy it, and we spend billions of dollars after this so called regime change where we are going to institute democracy, and the terrorists are still operating. When are you going to break up the al Qaeda cells right here in America? When are we going to get with our allies and put together a strong approach to rooting out the terrorists all over the world?

Mr. President, we must raise these questions. We must raise these questions because we are patriots. We are folks who love this country. We are folks who have stood by this country no matter what, and we will continue to stand by this country. We will continue to stand by our soldiers. But, Mr. President, you are going to have to account for the leadership that you are giving, and I say to you and all those who are advising you, be it Wolfowitz, be it Secretary of State Colin Powell, be it Condoleezza Rice, be it Carl Rove, or any of those in the inner circle, you are going to be held responsible for what takes place in this world, what takes place with this preemptive strike, what takes place with our soldiers and our families.

We would like to see this situation resolved in a way that will not cause the body bags to come home. We would like to see this situation resolved in a way that our young people

would not be put in harm's way.

It is not too late, Mr. President. We will all stand up and applaud you if you do the courageous thing of saying, yes, we deployed; yes, we spent billions of dollars to do it; but we do not have the allies, we cannot afford the costs, and we cannot afford the loss of lives. I am going to bring our soldiers home.

We will stand with you and praise you and applaud you and say you are a great man. Unless you can do it that way, Mr. President, you are going to have to accept the responsibility.