

Obama Now Claims It Wasn't His Decision to Leave Iraq

On Saturday morning, just before heading off on a two-week vacation, President Obama updated reporters on the progress of U.S. airstrikes against the ISIS terrorist group in Iraq. In response to a question about whether he regretted withdrawing our troops from the country in 2011, given how quickly ISIS subsequently took over parts of the country, the president delivered this whopper:

“What I just find interesting is the degree to which this issue keeps on coming up, **as if this was my decision.**”

Well there you have it, folks... The man who campaigned fiercely for two years on withdrawing our U.S. forces from Iraq really had nothing to do with bringing them all home after all.

The U.S. president who delivered a speech in October of 2011, bragging about holding true to that campaign promise, and declaring an end to the Iraq War, was apparently just kidding.

“As a candidate for President, I pledged to bring the war in Iraq to a responsible end – for the sake of our national security and to strengthen American leadership around the world,” Obama proudly said in that speech. *“After taking office, I announced a new strategy that would end our combat mission in Iraq and remove all of our troops by the end of 2011... So today, I can report that, as promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year.”*

Granted, these excerpts were taken from an Internet transcript on Whitehouse.gov. Since I didn't look up the actual video of the speech, it's entirely possible that the president was crossing his fingers while he spoke, or perhaps there was a laugh-track playing in the background to signify that he wasn't actually being serious about what he said.

Maybe Vice President Joe Biden was just being silly, as well, when he said in 2010 that the withdrawal of our troops in Iraq would be “one of the great achievements of this administration.” After all, how can something that wasn’t even President Obama’s decision be one of his great achievements?

Maybe whoever runs President Obama’s official Twitter account misquoted the president when they tweeted in November of 2012, just before his re-election: “I said that I’d end the war in Iraq, and I ended it.”

In Saturday’s address, the president tried to explain exactly *why* withdrawing troops from Iraq in 2011 wasn’t his decision: “*Under the previous administration, we had turned over the country to a sovereign, democratically elected Iraqi government. In order for us to maintain troops in Iraq, we needed the invitation of the Iraqi government, and we needed assurances that our personnel would be immune from prosecution if, for example, they were protecting themselves and ended up getting in a firefight with Iraqis, that they wouldn’t be hauled before an Iraqi judicial system.*”

The president is of course referring to the now infamous *status of forces* agreement which was indeed never signed by the Iraq government. The only problem is that President Obama, as the New York Times reported in 2012, had no real interest in establishing that agreement in the first place. There was never a serious attempt made. And President Obama confirmed this position in a 2012 debate with Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney:

Mitt Romney: “*With regards to Iraq, you and I agreed, I believe, that there should be a status of forces agreement.*”

President Obama: “*That’s not true.*”

Mitt Romney: “*Oh, you didn’t want a status of forces agreement?*”

President Obama: *"No. What I would not have done is left 10,000 troops in Iraq that would tie us down. That certainly would not help us in the Middle East."*

So there you go. The president stated in his own words in 2012 that he did *not* want a status of forces agreement, and defended *his* decision not to leave a residual force behind in Iraq.

Yet, less than two years later, he's now claiming that he was merely a bystander in negotiations with the Iraq government, thus he shouldn't be blamed for the very actions he *repeatedly* took credit for while campaigning for re-election in 2012.

Even for a man whose breathtaking dishonesty and impulse to blame others for his own failings have become legendary over the past 6 years, this really is off the rails. How many people have been murdered by ISIS in an Iraq that was relatively stable when President Obama inherited it, as a result of the administration deciding it was politically advantageous to abandon our hard-fought victory there?

While I'm glad the president is now taking some action in Iraq, it doesn't even begin to excuse all of the painfully poor decision making, shameless doublespeak, and nauseating dodging of accountability surrounding his handling of that country. I wrote this in a previous column, but it's worth repeating: What we've seen in Iraq, at the hands of ISIS, is perhaps the most predictable U.S. foreign policy blunder in my lifetime.

The media certainly held President Bush accountable for his failings on Iraq. To his credit, Bush owned the mess. Will the media do the same with President Obama, or instead let our president rewrite his own legacy once again?

Sadly, I'm pretty sure I already know the answer to that.