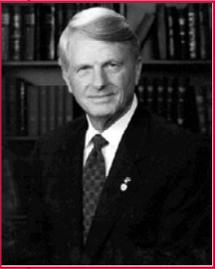


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## Vietnam, Iraq, and the 2004 Election

### The Honorable Zell Miller

United States Senator



**ZELL MILLER** was born in Young Harris, Georgia, and served in the United States Marine Corps. After receiving his B.A. and M.A. degrees in history from the University of Georgia, he was elected mayor of Young Harris in the late 1950s. Following service as a state senator and two terms as governor of Georgia, he was elected to the U.S. Senate in November 2000 to serve the remaining four years of the late Senator Paul Coverdell's term, becoming only the third Georgian to be elected both governor and senator. He did not seek re-election in 2004. A lifelong Democrat but a staunch supporter of the war on terrorism, Senator Miller delivered the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention. He is author of the best-selling book, *A National Party No More: The Conscience of a Conservative Democrat*. He and his wife Shirley have two sons, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

*The following is adapted from a speech delivered on December 9, 2004, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., at the fifth annual Hillsdale College Churchill Dinner.*

The most significant meaning of the 2004 election is that America has renounced the worst lessons of the post-Vietnam era. America's faith in freedom has been reaffirmed. With the re-election of President Bush, America recommitted itself to expanding freedom and promoting liberty.

This election validated not only America's role in promoting freedom, but also the faith our Founding Fathers placed in average folks to chart the course of this great nation. In the 2004 election, the American people confronted the ghost of Vietnam and considered the threats in today's world. In deciding how we would confront these threats, the American people decided that while America is not perfect, America has been, and still is, a force for peace and freedom in the world — and that we should act for, rather than retreat from, that reality.

America has rejoined the contest for freedom, which is manifested in a new form called the Bush Doctrine. That is why the rejection of a Vietnam-tainted worldview in this election is so monumental. For a bad idea must be weeded out before a good idea can take root.

To be sure, Vietnam holds certain lessons for America. But for far too many in the media, academia and public leadership, Vietnam became the *only* point of reference when thinking about military force and foreign policy. Vietnam alone defined them — and was consequently responsible for their narrow view of America. But we know that many of our other struggles are at least as important for understanding America's place in the world, if not more so. The waters of Pearl Harbor, the thick forests of the Argonne, the ghastly ovens of Auschwitz, the turbulent air over Germany and the shores of Normandy all hold lessons for America. So, too, do the beaches of Iwo Jima, the frozen mountain passes of Korea, the western ridges of Gettysburg, the rolling plains of Manassas, the long-manned watchtowers of Central Europe and so many other consecrated sites. But ever since Vietnam, all those other sacred struggles for freedom were overshadowed by the experience of that one struggle. For too many, all was forgotten — except Vietnam.



## The Rise of “Blame America First”

Many of us can remember when this view arrived: It was the 1972 election when the Democratic Party of FDR, Harry Truman and JFK was taken over by the anti-war Democratic Party of George McGovern. From that point on, a post-Vietnam mindset dominated the Democratic Party. We never got over it. And it grew into the view that America was always the problem. Our enemies – never called Communists – were considered excessive reformers whose motives were noble. Meanwhile America’s motives, and those of our allies, were suspect.

Those who had this post-Vietnam mindset considered the primary output of capitalism to be poverty, and argued that poverty – not any lust for power in the Kremlin or Cuba – was the cause of the armed revolts around the world. They preached that military force never solved anything – and that if it did, it shouldn’t. It was almost as if they wanted to protect the world *from* America.

These Democratic radicals opposed our funding of the Contras in Nicaragua. They opposed our support for El Salvador against Marxist guerillas and, generally, our support for freedom fighters anywhere in the world. They opposed our weapons systems as the main threat to world peace. They attacked, resisted, tried to cancel or cut just about every weapons system that Ronald Reagan proposed to win the Cold War. The list is long: the B-1 Bomber, the MX missile, the Pershing missile, the Abrams tank, the Bradley fighting vehicle, the Trident submarine, and many other fighters and carriers. All were condemned as militaristic and unnecessary.

In place of a strong national defense, they proposed the nuclear freeze, the ban on nuclear testing, more U.N. funding, unlimited foreign aid and unending negotiations. These, they told us, were the paths to a safe world.

Some dared to call these Democrats the “Blame America First” crowd, and rightly so. For when the Berlin Wall fell and a half billion people from the Urals to the Baltic, from Siberia to the Crimea, became free, those who had been giving America all the blame now failed to give Ronald Reagan and America any of the credit. The Cold War was the greatest victory for freedom in the history of the world. But those of the post-Vietnam mindset praised it not.

So America entered the post-Cold War era still conflicted, but the divisions were latent – until 9/11, when we learned new lessons of freedom in a grassy field in Pennsylvania, the halls of the Pentagon and the skyscrapers of lower

Manhattan. On that day – the day historian David McCullough has called the worst in U.S. history – the scales of the American worldview tipped back toward reality. Americans rediscovered that the world is a dangerous place, that freedom is fragile, and that America cannot ignore the role it must play in leading the free world.

But while 9/11 woke up many to these cold hard facts of life, it also stirred the dormant but un-diminished ghost of Vietnam. The same stroke that unleashed the war in Iraq let loose a host of demons from the past. For the “Blame America First” crowd, it was as if the question of what is in the best interest of our nation during a time of war was never asked, or its answer never heeded.

## The Lost Idea of National Unity

The depths of this collapse in national unity can only be understood by looking back on leading instances of bipartisan unity in post wars. My favorite is Wendell Wilkie, who ran for president against Franklin Roosevelt in 1940. At the time, Roosevelt was pushing for a very unpopular idea: a peacetime draft. And instead of attacking the vulnerable Roosevelt on this issue, Wilkie gave him critical support. Further, he made it clear that he would rather lose the election than make national security a partisan campaign issue. Shortly before Wilkie died, he told a friend that if he could write his own epitaph and had to choose between “Here Lies a President” or “Here Lies One Who Contributed to Saving Freedom,” he would prefer the latter.

That kind of unity was not rare in those days. It was the norm. When President Truman needed support to oppose communism with the Marshall Plan – an unpopular idea at the time – Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg stepped forward and helped pass it. Two young Navy veterans and freshmen Congressmen by the names of Kennedy and Nixon also supported Truman. That was the attitude that once prevailed: Republicans supported a war-time Democrat and Democrats supported a wartime Republican. Vietnam changed all that.

What did we get from the Vietnam-obsessed theorists in the Iraq War? In essence, they decided to re-fight Vietnam. They recalled that in the 1960s, the way they achieved victory was by pulling down the President from within rather than defeating the enemy abroad. This became their victory plan again. They agreed that regime change was needed – but regime change in Washington, D.C., not in Iraq. So, they called the Iraq war “the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time.” In their eyes, the war was

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doomed and somehow illegitimate because it was an “American process” and not an “international process.” They smeared our allies, saying they were “a coalition of the coerced and the bribed.” And then these same critics attacked the President because he did not have more such allies.

Again and again, they came up with ways to blame America, claiming that Iraq had not been a breeding ground for terrorism until our invasion had made it one. They called the new Iraq government “an American puppet.” Even though they knew our troops would be put at increased risk by a misperception that America was trying to colonize Iraq or grab its oil, they went ahead and made those dangerous and damaging charges anyway. They knew it was terribly wrong not to provide funding for our troops fighting in the field. They said it themselves. But then these same leaders voted against funds for our troops in the most gutless and reprehensible vote ever cast in time of war. In almost every situation where their responsibility to their country conflicted with their desire for political power, they chose political power over the best interest of their country.

## The Voters of November

Only the post-Vietnam mindset can explain the behavior of these national leaders. Many of them, I’m sorry to say, still have not changed the way they have looked at the world since the 1960s. And, knowing them, I doubt they ever will. Instead, our hope for tomorrow came from the voters of November. As they judged what was going on in Iraq, they too recalled what happened in Vietnam. But they didn’t stop there. From the tragedy of 9/11, they came to understand what Churchill once called our “awe-inspiring accountability to the future.” They realized that their country and their president were making decisions that would affect the lives and freedoms, not just of our loved ones today, but of generations of Americans to come.

Throughout 2003 and 2004, the American people listened to the political debates in Washington, D.C., and around the country and weighed America’s role in the world. The World War II memorial was dedicated during this time, and we gave thanks and remembered the sacrifices of the “greatest generation.” We recalled also how millions were spared the tyranny of fascism, and could not help but note that

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our enemies in World War Two are now free, prosperous, peaceful democracies that respect human rights and individual liberty – thanks to the efforts of America! And, as we all traveled with our dear departed President Reagan to his final reunion, America's voters pondered the hundreds of millions of free people no longer enslaved behind the Iron Curtain, who enjoy their freedom because of this good man and America's resolve to win the Cold War. It was Reagan's dream, but it was America's resolve that made the greatest liberation of mankind the under-appreciated miracle it is today.

As the shrill charges of the post-Vietnam crowd rained down, Americans weighed these events. They wondered: If America is not a liberator, why are our old enemies today free, prosperous and independent? If America creates puppets, why are countries we liberated now free to resist and object? If America is the problem with the world, what would the world look like today without us? Their answer on November 2nd, in as resounding a manner as a free people can deliver, was to say that America is what is *right* with the world, rejecting the post-Vietnam assumption that America is always what is wrong.

The message of the voters of November was that any nation that has done so much for the freedom of strangers, that has brought prosperity and peace to hundreds of millions, that has free elections and a free press – that any nation with such characteristics and such a record deserves the *benefit* of the doubt. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this point: The worst aspects of the Vietnam-obsessed opposition party in the recent election campaign was the doubt its leaders directed against every action of America, and the lack of any doubt directed against America's enemies. In the debate over Iraq's fate, we saw these leaders and many in the media granting every benefit of the doubt to a mass murdering, neighbor-invading, terrorist-harboring and dictatorial regime.

The plain facts are that Saddam Hussein not only had, but *used* weapons of mass destruction on foreigners and on his own countrymen, filled mass graves with hundreds of thousands, invaded three countries and dropped missiles on Israel. He repeatedly and consistently violated UN sanctions, gave refuge to the killers of American Leon Klinghoffer, and paid families of suicide bombers in Israel. The civilized world could not permit a man like Hussein to continue in power. The American voter agreed.

By saying no to the wrong ideology at the wrong time, America has dodged a bullet, and a failed dogma is doomed to wither and die on its poisoned vine. The most destructive idea in America of the past half century has been dismissed and America

now has the opportunity to act with energy in support of the best idea of man – the idea of freedom. That is the core of the Bush Doctrine. It is simple but effective.

## The Bush Doctrine

The Bush Doctrine means, first, that America will not hesitate to use force to stop terrorism. We will act, react, block and prevent it. Terrorism will no longer be considered a social problem, a political statement or a criminal infraction. Instead, it will be seen as an act of war, and our response will be appropriate.

The second part of the Bush Doctrine appears to be new, but really isn't. It concerns the role of liberty. Simply put, liberty works. It isn't free. It has its costs. But liberty saves more than it costs.

In Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*, the Duke of Burgundy recounts the losses and sacrifices of a bloody war that drained the heart of the French aristocracy at Agincourt. Then he asks the eternal question, now forgotten by European leaders:

You are assembled; and my speech entreats  
That I may know the let why gentle Peace,  
Should not expel these inconveniences,  
And bless us with her former qualities.

In Europe, where small wars once raged incessantly and major wars cursed every generation, the courage and steadfastness of FDR, Churchill and Truman brought a gentle peace lasting now almost 60 years. What great change occurred? Liberty. After World War II, America fought hard to ensure that constitutional democracies with individual rights and free elections replaced the totalitarian regimes that had been our enemies. Some said that nations like Germany and Japan, with their militaristic backgrounds and totalitarian pasts, could never make the transition to freedom, individual rights and the rule of law. Yet they did. And with such liberty and consensus based on individual rights ingrained at home, that spirit has translated into international cooperation and respect. That U.S. policies following WWII could change the history of lands known for war-making proves their potential.

No one claims or believes that freedom is free. Struggle is required, and the linkage between struggle and freedom is as old as time itself. No one captured this understanding as well as Frederick Douglass in 1857:

The whole history of the progress of human  
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liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. . . . If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

Abraham Lincoln added to this in his second annual message to Congress: "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom for the free. . . . Honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve, we shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth."

President Bush's speeches about introducing freedom to a region known for tyranny and terror follow in this tradition.

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Two years before Munich, when no one would listen, Churchill warned:

We must recognize that we have a great treasure . . . . The inheritance in our possessions represents the prolonged achievements of the centuries. There is not one of our simple

uncounted rights today for which better men than we have not died on the scaffold or the battlefield. We have not only a great treasure, we have a great cause.

If you take one thing away with you tonight, I pray it is this: American civilization deserves protection and has earned the benefit of the doubt. Do not let barbarians use our civility and freedom to destroy our liberty. Do not let barbarians sack civilization simply because they knock gently. Holding the course for freedom is hard. But with all I've learned from study, age and experience, I believe, with every fiber of my body, that there comes a time when a civilization has to choose between good and evil, between freedom and tyranny.

I retire from the Senate heartened that the America of our forefathers has made, once again, the right choice for freedom. And I thank Providence above for the wisdom our Founders demonstrated by entrusting the direction of this nation to the common man and woman. From these ordinary folks, we have again seen extraordinary leadership, and for that we can all rejoice.



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