

By Ryan Grim

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President Barack Obama defended the American invasion of Iraq Wednesday in a high-profile speech to address the Russian takeover of Crimea. Russian officials, Obama noted, have pointed to the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq as an example of "Western hypocrisy."

Obama struggled, however, in his attempt to defend the legality of the invasion. The war was unsanctioned by the United Nations, and many experts assert it [violated any standard reading of international law](#). But, argued Obama, at least the U.S. tried to make it legal. "America sought to work within the international system," Obama said, referencing an attempt to gain U.N. approval for the invasion -- an effort that later proved to be founded on flawed, misleading and cherry-picked intelligence. The man who delivered the presentation to the U.N., then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, has repeatedly called it a ["blot" on his record](#).

Obama, in his speech, noted his own opposition to the war, but went on to defend its mission.

"We did not claim or annex Iraq's territory. We did not grab its resources for our own gain," Obama argued. In fact, the U.S. [forced Iraq to privatize its oil industry](#), which had previously been under the control of the state, and further required that it accept foreign ownership of the industry. The effort to transfer the resources to the control of multinational, largely U.S.-based oil companies has been hampered in part by the decade of violence unleashed by the invasion.

Obama's assertion also hinges on how broadly one construes the word "our." Taxpayers on the one hand are worse off, as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have [added \\$2 trillion to the national debt](#), according to one study. But contractors [reaped tremendous gains](#), and Halliburton -- a company often associated with the invasion, of which former Vice President Dick Cheney served as CEO -- saw its stock price surge from under \$10 a share to over \$50, before falling along with the rest of the market in 2008. (It has since recovered.)

Obama concluded his speech Wednesday by arguing that whatever one thinks of the invasion and subsequent occupation, at least U.S. troops are no longer there. "We ended our war and left Iraq to its people and a fully sovereign Iraqi state that can make decisions about its own future," he said.

The people charged with making those decisions might beg to differ. The president's paeon to Iraqi democracy comes one day after the entire board of the country's electoral commission resigned en masse, protesting political interference and, [according to Reuters](#), "casting doubt on a nationwide vote scheduled for next month." Critics have accused Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of a systematic effort to remove opponents from the ballot.

Across Iraq, [68 people were killed](#) the same day the commissioners stepped down.