

# Bush Urged to Counsel with “Wise Women” on Iraq

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Recommendation: Try a Circle of “Wise Women”

By way of re-introduction, we begin with a brief reminder of the analyses we provided you before the attack on Iraq. On the afternoon of February 5, 2003, following Colin Powell’s speech before the UN Security Council that morning, we sent you our critique of his attempt to make the case for war. (You may recall that we gave him an “A” for assembling and listing the charges against Iraq and a “C-” for providing context and perspective.) Unlike Powell, we made no claim that our analysis was “irrefutable” or “undeniable.” We did point out, though, that what he said fell far short of justification for war. We closed with these words:

“We are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.”

To jog your memory further, the thrust of our next two pre-war memoranda can be gleaned from their titles: “Cooking Intelligence for War” (March 12) and “Forgery, Hyperbole, Half-Truth: A Problem” (March 18). When the war started, we reasoned at first that you might have been oblivious to our cautions. However, last spring’s disclosures in the “Downing Street Memo” containing the official minutes of Tony Blair’s briefing on July 23, 2002, and the particularly the bald acknowledgement that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” of war on Iraq, show that the White House was well aware of how the intelligence was being cooked. We write you now in the hope that the sour results of the recipe, the current bedlam in Iraq, will incline you to seek and ponder wider opinion this time around.

## **A Still Narrower Circle**

With the departure of Colin Powell, your circle of advisers has shrunk rather than widened. The amateur architects of the Iraq war, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, seem still to have your ear. At a similar stage of the Vietnam War, President Lyndon Johnson woke up to the fact that he had been poorly served by his principal advisers and quickly appointed an

informal group of "wise men" to provide fresh insight and advice. It turned out to be one of the smartest things Johnson did. He was brought to realize that the US could not prevail in Vietnam; that he was finished politically; and that the US needed to move to negotiations with the Vietnamese "insurgents."

It is clear to those of us who witnessed at first hand the gross miscalculations on Vietnam that a similar juncture has now been reached on Iraq. We are astonished at the advice you have been getting, the vice president's recent assurance that the Iraqi resistance is "in its last throes," for example. (Shades of his assurances that US forces would be welcomed as "liberators" in Iraq.) And Secretary Rumsfeld's unreassuring reminders that "some things are unknowable" and the familiar bromide that "time will tell" are wearing thin. By now it is probably becoming clear to you that you need outside counsel.

The good news is that some help is on its way. Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey has taken the initiative to schedule a hearing on September 15, where knowledgeable specialists on various aspects of the situation in Iraq will present their views. Unfortunately, it appears that this opportunity to learn will fall short of the extremely informative bipartisan hearings led by Sen. William Fulbright on Vietnam. The refusal thus far of the House Republican leadership to make a suitable conference room available suggests that the Woolsey hearing, like the one led by Congressman John Conyers on June 16, will lack the kind of bipartisan support so necessary if one is to deal sensibly with the Iraq problem.

Meanwhile, we respectfully suggest that you could profit from the insights of the informal group of "wise women" right there in Crawford. You could hardly do better than to ride your bike down to Camp Casey. There you will find Gold Star mothers, Iraq (and Vietnam) war veterans, and others eager to share reality-based perspectives of the kind you are unlikely to hear from your small circle of yes-men and the yes-woman in Washington, none of whom have had direct experience of war. As you know, Cindy Sheehan has been waiting to get on your calendar. She is now back in Crawford and has resumed her Lazarus-at-the-Gate vigil in front of your ranch. We strongly suggest that you take time out from your vacation to meet with her and the other Gold Star mothers when you get back to Crawford later this week. This would be a useful way for you to acquire insight into the many shades of gray between the blacks and whites of Iraq, and to become more sensitized to the indignities that so often confound and infuriate the mothers, fathers, wives, and other relatives of soldiers killed and wounded there.

### **Names and Faces**

Here are the names, ages, and hometowns of the eight soldiers, including Casey Sheehan, killed in the ambush in Sadr City, Baghdad on April 4, 2004:

Specialist Robert R. Arsiaga, 25, San Antonio, Texas

Specialist Ahmed A. Cason, 24, McCalla, Alabama

Sergeant Yihjyh L. Chen, 31, Saipan, Marianas

Specialist Israel Garza, 25, Lubbock, Texas

Specialist Stephen D. Hiller, 25, Opelika, Alabama

Corporal Forest J. Jostes, 22, Albion, Illinois

Sergeant Michael W. Mitchell, 25, Porterville, California

Specialist Casey A. Sheehan, 24, Vacaville, California

Mike Mitchell's father, Bill, has been camped out for two weeks with Cindy Sheehan and others a short bike ride from your place. They have a lot of questions, big and small. You are aware of the big ones: In what sense were the deaths of Casey, Mike Mitchell and the others "worth it?" In what sense is the continued occupation of Iraq a "noble cause?" No doubt you have been given talking points on those. But the time has passed for sound bites and rhetoric. We are suggesting something much more real, and private.

## Questions

There are less ambitious, one might call them more tactical, questions that are also accompanied by a lot of pain and frustration. Those eight fine soldiers were killed by forces loyal to the fiercely anti-American Muqtada al-Sadr, the young Shia cleric with a militant following, particularly in Baghdad's impoverished suburbs. The ambush was part of a violent uprising resulting from US Ambassador Paul Bremer's decision to close down Al Hawza, Al-Sadr's newspaper, on March 28, 2004.

And not only that. A senior aide of al-Sadr was arrested by US forces on April 3. The following day al-Sadr ordered his followers to "terrorize" occupation forces and this sparked the deadly street battles, including the ambush. Also on April 4, Bremer branded al-Sadr an "outlaw" and coalition spokesman Dan Senior said coalition forces planned to arrest him as well. In sum, before one can begin to understand the grief of Cindy, Bill, and the relatives of the other six soldiers killed, you need to know, as they do, what else was going on April 4, 2004.

You may wish to come prepared to answer specific questions like the following:

1. Closing down newspapers and arresting key opposition figures seem a strange way to foster democracy. Please explain. And how could Ambassador Bremer possibly have thought that al-Sadr would simply acquiesce?
2. Muqtada al-Sadr seems to have landed on his feet. At this point, he and other Shiite clerics appear on the verge of imposing an Islamic state with Shariah law

and a very close relationship with Iran. With this kind of prospect, can you feel the frustration of Gold Star mothers when the extremist ultimately responsible for their sons' deaths assumes a leadership role in the new Iraq? Can you understand their strong wish to prevent the sacrifice of still more of our children for such dubious purpose?

Perhaps you will have good answers to these and other such questions. Good answers or no, we believe a quiet, respectful session with the wise women and perhaps others at your doorstep would give you valuable new insights into the ironic conundrums and human dimensions of the war in Iraq.

A member of our Steering Committee, Ann Wright, has been on site at Camp Casey from the outset and would be happy to facilitate such a session. A veteran Army colonel (and also a senior Foreign Service officer until she resigned in protest over the attack on Iraq), Ann has been keeping Camps Casey I and II running in a good-neighborly, orderly way. She is well known to your Secret Service agents, who can lead you to her. We strongly urge you not to miss this opportunity.

Gene Betit, Arlington, VA

Sibel Edmonds, Alexandria, Virginia

Larry Johnson, Bethesda, Maryland

David MacMichael, Linden, VA

Ray McGovern, Arlington, VA

Coleen Rowley, Apple Valley, Minnesota

Ann Wright, Honolulu, Hawaii

Steering Group

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

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