

page report that despite “considerable political flux and popular dissatisfaction” in Iran, the country “is not on the verge of another revolution” and “those forces that are committed to preserving Iran’s current system remain firmly in control,” they are basically saying, “We knew Lech Walesa. Lech Walesa was a good friend of ours. But there is no Iranian Lech Walesa.”

While they reject the notion of a grand bargain to settle the many differences between the two countries, they propose making “incremental progress on key issues, including regional stability and nuclear issues.” Diplomacy is the only way to resolve the problems between Iran and the U.S., Gates told the press when the report was issued in July. Military action against Iran was “highly unlikely to be attempted, and, if attempted, to be successful.”

Gates and Brzezinski recommend a “direct dialogue on specific issues of regional stabilization” relating to Iraq in the same way that the U.S. has been willing to negotiate with the Iranians on issues relating to the stabilization of Afghanistan. Applying the China analogy, Brzezinski suggested that Washington might offer to sign a “basic statement of principles” similar to the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué that eventually brought about the normalization in 1979. Washington’s goal lies in persuading the Iranians that the two governments can work together to advance their interests in the region. “It’s not a question that we and the Iranians would be sitting down and singing ‘kumbaya’ together,” said Gates, arguing that by improving U.S. ties with Iran, we will be advancing our national interests. ■

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## Disservice to My Son

A Marine father’s lament

by **Leon T. Knauer**

AS A PARENT and former Marine, I was proud of my son Robert’s decision to accept a commission in the U.S. Marine Corps five years ago. Today he is a captain, serving his second tour in Iraq. Our forces continue to perform admirably, but until he comes home, I no longer watch the evening news in the same way.

Shortly before he left for the second time, I joined Robert and a group of his fellow Marines at Chadwick’s, a pub in Georgetown. That night, they seemed like any other young men—boisterous, jocular, well aware of the girls at the bar—but they are so unlike much of their generation. These are our finest, and their families trust that their lives will be risked only when necessary, that they will not be sent shorthanded, and that their morale will be maintained.

In the months since that memorable night, I have concluded that my trust in our political leaders has been misplaced. I love my son. I am proud of the man he has become. But I believe that President Bush and his administration have disserved him and his compatriots in Iraq.

I did not come to these conclusions easily. I am a longtime conservative who supported President Bush in 2000. As an attorney, I defended Republican notables in the Watergate affair and represented the attorney for President Reagan’s Intelligence Oversight Committee in the Iran-Contra hearings. I thus felt parental pride when my son interned with the American Enterprise Institute, the Catholic Campaign for America, and

Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.). Robert’s senior treatise was on Edmund Burke, he was editor of the conservative paper at Holy Cross, and the conservative advocate on the campus radio program “Holy Cross Fire.” Like father, like son. Now I do not know what to tell him. The Republican Party has lost its bearings, and the Democrats have not offered an appealing alternative. I did not vote for the re-election of President Bush.

A number of Americans believe that the war with Iraq was unnecessary, and an even greater number believe that the reconstruction effort has been handled poorly. That is history. The critical question is what we should do now.

Do we have a sufficient number of adequately trained troops to meet our needs? Fortunately, most military leaders have not expressed their views on this subject. Had they done so, it would have been at the risk of being relieved, thereby depriving my son and his compatriots of the most capable commanders. But respected military leaders no longer in positions of authority, including retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, have been outspoken in their criticism of the Department of Defense for failing to have enough trained troops and replacements. Indeed, Zinni believes that we would be better served if Rumsfeld were removed. Re-enlistment is down, recruitment has become difficult, and we are compensating by recycling already overextended personnel.

More specifically, Marine units are being sent to Iraq before completing their training cycles. The normal state-

side rotation of some units may be reduced from 12 months to six. Artillery personnel may be transferred to infantry units—which means that artillery units will not be available should the need arise. And those serving in Iraq may have their combat tours extended.

During the campaign, President Bush discounted our troop shortage and asserted that the Iraqi militia would soon replace our military. Senator Kerry acknowledged our troop shortage and suggested increasing the number of active-duty personnel. Neither candidate had the political courage to suggest reintroducing the draft because that would have run the risk of losing votes. According to the Bush administration, we are in an all-out war against terrorism. Yet few in our society are feeling any pain. Few are really participating in this war. If the draft is not a viable option, we are clearly not committed and should prepare for an orderly withdrawal.

Each day the media shows faces of young people killed in Iraq. In past wars, the families of our political leaders—Presidents Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Johnson—actively participated. It would thus be enlightening if the growing casualty list were accompanied by a chart that named the sons, daughters, and other relatives of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and other administration officials who are serving in the military. If the number is substantial, it would boost morale and establish that our leaders are willing to make the same sacrifice they ask of fathers like me. And if, as I believe, the number is small or even nonexistent, the terrorists would be justified in concluding that the commitment of our leaders is not serious.

I did not discuss this article with my son because I did not want to compromise his obligations as an officer. Robert, however, expressed his views in a limited way in an interview in Yusufiya, Iraq

with a reporter for the *New York Times* last month: “The enduring optimism of many American troops was summed up by Capt. Rob Knauer of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, who emphasized the need to train Iraqis to do the house-to-house operations in the long run. ‘We can win a war this way,’ he said.”

Robert’s optimism is evidence of his determination to achieve this objective, but he needs help. Right now, the Iraqi militia is an illusion, or perhaps more appropriately a mirage. Training a formidable Iraqi militia will take time, and Iraqis will want to join only if they have something to protect—the ability to have basic necessities, to educate their children, to lead secure lives. President Bush’s insistence notwithstanding, an Iraqi militia will not be the answer to our troop shortage problem for some time. My son did not say otherwise.

At present, our military is required to co-ordinate with the Iraqi interim government, which was created in haste to give the appearance of a representative government. But this three-headed camel—the U.S. administration, the interim government, and our military—has undermined efficiency and morale. The observation of Marine Lt. Gen. James Conway, who recently completed his tour as commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force, is a case in point. General Conway’s warnings about the dangers of attacking Fallujah were ignored and, despite his protests, the attack was aborted at midpoint. This political oversight restricted flexibility and brought back memories of Lebanon, where 241 Marines, soldiers, and sailors were killed in a military operation overmanaged by politicians.

Most Americans assumed that the reconstruction of Iraq would be handled with the usual U.S. efficiency in a country where, we were advised, citizens would welcome us and assist in our effort. Unfortunately, corruption

has become common—one has to pay a \$500 bribe to get a visa—many contractors are more concerned about excess profit than getting the job done, and Iraqis interested in participating are confronted with miles of red tape. I am unable to offer a solution. That is beyond my competence. But I did not launch an invasion without a plan for peace, then fail to admit error and seek help.

Compounding these hardships—insufficient troop strength and training, lack of commitment at home, political meddling, and bungled reconstruction—our troops face an additional obstacle that the American political establishment won’t even discuss. While I believe that the territorial integrity of Israel should be guaranteed, I also believe, as do many citizens of Israel, that an independent Palestine is not possible if thousands of invaders occupy strategic locations in this emerging nation. After siding with the Sharon government, how could we send our Marines and soldiers to a Muslim country and expect them to be greeted as disciples of democracy rather than implementers of Israeli expansion?

As a proud American, a veteran, and the father of a young man whose life is on the line, I am deeply distressed. My plea is probably a futile one. Our political leaders seem to lack the moral fiber to admit these problems, much less discuss how they might be corrected. But just as my son has a duty to serve, his country has a reciprocal obligation to ensure that he has what he needs to fulfill his mission. That expectation belongs not just to him, but to parents like me who have given the best we have and now count the days until they come home. ■

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# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[Alfie]

### What's It All About?

By Steve Sailer

THE SIXTIES DIDN'T HAPPEN until the Seventies in the movie business (because studios never trust anybody under 30 to make expensive features), so film critics have tended to disregard that decade, but I prefer the unhipness of Sixties movies, made by a hardier, less self-indulgent generation.

Lately, the industry has been demonstrating the sincerest form of flattery by remaking a raft of Sixties films, such as "The Manchurian Candidate," "The Alamo," "Planet of the Apes," and "The In-Laws"—with almost uniformly dire results.

This genre's only success was last year's nifty updating of the Michael Caine heist flick "The Italian Job," so it was predictable that Caine's trademark film, the 1966 comedy-drama "Alfie," about a womanizing Cockney chauffeur, would be redone. As Canadian commentator Colby Cosh has noted, Hollywood believes "The public adores the familiar, even if all they know is that it should be familiar," and anybody who has ever set foot in a piano bar has that catchy Bacharach-David line "What's it all about, Alfie?" tattooed to his gray matter.

Jude Law, the cute young Englishman who is in six movies this autumn,

replaces Caine as the cad who slowly learns he should have acted like a dad, but incompatibilities quickly surface. Caine was 33, a Korean combat veteran, 6'-2," and every inch a man. With his bulging Adam's apple and pop eyes, Caine's Alfie was a tad funny looking, but his cast-iron confidence made him irresistible. In Alfie's many asides spoken directly to the camera, Caine's rather flat affect was ultimately less tiresome than Law's attempts to charm and seduce. In short, Caine addressed the men in the audience, Law the women.

Law is 31, but he seems callow in comparison, which squanders the purportedly devastating blow to Alfie's pride at the end. In the original, when Alfie called on a wealthy and salacious widow (Shelly Winters) with whom he has been dallying, he found a longhaired electric guitarist in her bed. Caine's Alfie, an old-fashioned beer-and-skittles bloke who wouldn't know The Who from Carnaby Street, plaintively asked, "What's he got that I don't?" She replied, "He's younger than you, Alfie." That line seems absurd, though, when Susan Sarandon drops it on the dewy-cheeked Law. Worse, the famous generation gap that might have excited a jaded matron in 1966 hardly exists anymore.

Stylistically, the new version can't seem to make up its mind whether it's set in the Swinging London of 1966 or the Manhattan of 2004. Girls in go-go boots with ironed-straight blonde hair and kohl-rimmed eyes chat on cell phones. To add to the nostalgic confusion, Mick Jagger was hired to write the score. Mick keeps alive his streak of not having penned a good song since "Start Me Up" in 1981.

Changes in the script mostly dissipate the elemental power of the original. The

cad vs. dad distinction (first named by anthropologist Henry Harpending in 1982) had been underlined by the first version's subplot where Alfie's stand-by girlfriend, whom he wouldn't marry or support even though she'd given him a beloved son, wedded an unsexy bus conductor because he'd promised to provide for her little boy. Two years later, a despondent Alfie chanced upon the happy family at the christening of their second child.

But Law's Alfie isn't even the father of Marisa Tomei's little boy, and when she eventually dumps him, it's for a guy who is so cool looking that he could be the bass player for The Strokes.

Even worse is the loss of the famous climax that shattered, at least temporarily, Alfie's regal self-assurance. After he'd impregnated a sick friend's wife, he hired an illegal abortionist to induce her to deliver a stillbirth in his apartment. Returning home later, the camera focuses in on his trembling face as he found, we later learn, the dead body of his tiny but perfectly formed child.

Forty million legal abortions later, no Hollywood movie would dare drive home the reality of abortion so powerfully. So Law's Alfie merely chauffeurs his pal's girlfriend to the clinic, where, predictably, she decides not to have the abortion. In today's films, almost nobody ever actually has an abortion. See, everybody in Hollywood is pro-choice, but being pro-choice isn't about having abortions, it's about, like, the abstract, metaphysical concept of choice, you know.

Okay, sure, whatever ... but it makes for a forgettable movie. ■

Rated R for sexual content, some language and drug use.