

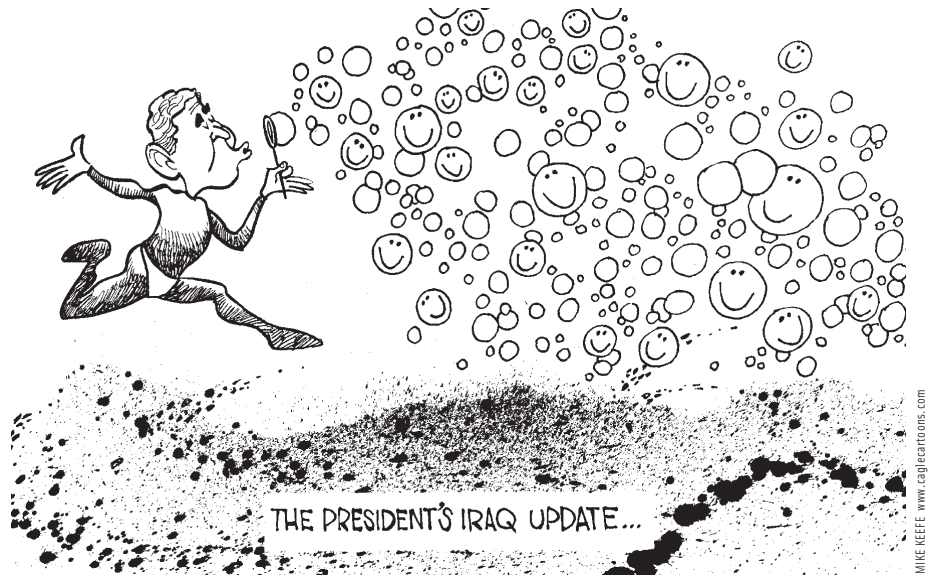
[PUNDITRY]

LIES & THE LYING LIAR

It can be hard to read the work of *National Review's* David Frum, now neoconservatism's most prominent wordsmith, without calling to mind Mary McCarthy's famous remark about Lillian Hellman: "Every word she writes is a lie—including 'and' and 'the.'" Of course the lies can be artfully constructed, based on slippery association or decontextualized quotations, to give falsehood the sheen of truth. But not always. Frum has a frothing-at-the-mouth animus against antiwar conservatives in general and Pat Buchanan in particular, and though he has nurtured this hatred for some 15 years it is now especially rabid because the Iraq War he fought so hard for (not in, needless to say) is going poorly. For Frum, the idea that conservatives who were more prudent than he about invading Iraq might gain in influence is more terrible even than the prospect of an independent Palestinian state.

So in a recent column on *National Review's* website, Frum sought once again to savage Buchanan. He charged that Buchanan's argument in his best-selling book *How the Right Went Wrong*—that war against al-Qaeda and the sheltering Taliban was right and necessary but war against Iraq had been a wrong-headed diversion—was based on a false premise. Buchanan, claimed Frum, actually opposed the Afghan War in 2001. So Frum wrote, "let us not have any false pretenses about where Buchanan has really stood over the past three years ... he should not be allowed to deny his own past history ... I cannot find *any* contemporaneous declaration of support from him for the Afghan campaign."

Frum's claim was simply false. We wrote *National Review's* online editor pointing this out and quoting from Buchanan columns praising Bush's conduct of the Afghan War. And one friend of



this magazine easily found and sent Frum a "McLaughlin Group" transcript from Oct. 2001 in which Buchanan was exuberant about the thrashing American forces were about to give the Taliban.

Confronted with evidence that undermined his argument, Frum could not bring himself to do the Dan Rather thing and apologize for misleading his readers. Instead, he claimed that Buchanan was engaged in "strange double messaging" that consisted of saying one thing in print, another on TV. But the "double messaging" is yet another Frum fiction: Buchanan columns written at the time of the Afghan War clearly praised the president's policy, urged him to "wage war against all who abetted the slaughter" and exhorted, "Let us pay back those who did this." A month later, Buchanan wrote, "let us go in, get them, get out, and go home." When Kabul fell, he wrote of "a good day for America and a great day for Mr. Bush."

If the world worked as Frum imagined, there would be no need to invent Buchanan's "opposition" to the Afghan War in order to tar him; his straightforward dissent to the Iraq War would suffice. But unfortunately for the Frums of the world, the opposition of Buchanan and other antiwar conservatives to the invasion of Iraq is evidence not—as Frum claims—of an absence of patriotism, but proof of wisdom and foresight.

[WAR]

SYRIA IN THEIR SIGHTS

It was surprising to read the *Washington Post's* Jim Hoagland beating the drums "to squeeze Syria into ending its oppressive, decades-long control over Lebanon." One might have thought the War Party had enough on its plate with Iraq and with trying to gin up an attack on Iran. Why another front of belligerence, and why now? Then we remembered—only days before, the *New York Times* had published a front-page story on the "comeback" of Beirut, a city that became a catchword for communal violence and terrorism before being bombed by the Israelis in the early 1980s. A generation later, Beirut is back—cafes are full, women dressed fashionably, new hotels and apartment buildings going up, the old cliché about the "Paris of the Middle East" again in vogue. And then we understood: for War Party agitators, the phrase "Paris of the Middle East" must be like the red flag before the bull.

[CULTURE]

CHURCH OF THE DIVINE SELF

It seems that secular humanists are finally getting religion, or at least an updated version in which no God is required. Michael Kress, writing in *Slate*, alerts us to the newest thing under the sun: secular life ceremonies.

Until now, believers have had a leg up when it came to weddings, births, and funerals. Now secularists are getting into the act. Some of these life ceremonies simply ape their religious counterparts but leave out the preaching, prayer, and scriptural readings. Others contain “spiritual” elements, but only those personally relevant to the participants—including, according to one officiant on the life-ceremonies beat, “an ancient Celtic wedding ritual in which the couples’ hands are tied together with a ceremonial ribbon or cloth” or “a commonly adopted Wiccan (neo-pagan) and Native American custom in which North, South, East, and West are summoned to bless and aid those involved in the ceremony.”

The key is to draw “on participants’ personal histories” as opposed to the faith of our fathers or the traditions of our civilization. And please, no God-talk. Let’s keep the focus where it belongs in important life events—on ourselves, of course.

[IRAQ]

SITE PREPARATION BEGINS?

“A year from now, I’ll be very surprised if there is not some grand square in Baghdad that is named after President Bush.”

—Richard Perle, AEI keynote speech
Sept. 22, 2003

“At least six people were killed and 54 wounded Wednesday in a suicide car bomb attack which ripped through a busy shopping area in Baghdad.”

—Agence France Presse
Sept. 22, 2004

[IMMIGRATION]

DRIVING WHILE ILLEGAL

What happens when routine law enforcement measures have a “disparate impact” on “undocumented immigrants”? The city of Oakland found one answer: simply call a moratorium on the offending

law enforcement. That’s what happened to the city’s program to reduce drunk driving with police checkpoints. These had the unintended consequence of ensnaring many Hispanic illegal aliens, unable to produce drivers licenses, proof of insurance, etc. When local Hispanic politicians complained loudly that this constituted harassment of those who “otherwise obey the law,” the Oakland police chief suspended the checkpoints. But it’s hard to be a police chief and openly claim you won’t enforce the law, so after a few days the chief suspended the suspension. Oakland will, once again, apparently be able to use checkpoints try to curb drunk driving. Sad to say, it’s hard to bet on the long-term survival of any American standard or rule that might inconvenience illegal aliens.

[BUDGET]

HEY THERE, BIG SPENDER

“Don’t go there, W.,” conservative commentator Michelle Malkin cautioned when the president began warning that John Kerry will “expand government.” While Kerry does have the distinct flavor of a big-government liberal, Bush’s spending record is one no principled fiscal conservative could applaud.

Bush notes that Kerry has not fully accounted for how he would pay for his laundry list of spending proposals. A fair point, but economic conservatives are also asking how Bush plans to pay for his promises. The Heritage Foundation’s Brian Riedl points out, “While it’s true that Kerry hasn’t provided a detailed plan, neither has the president.” Stephen Moore of the Club for Growth charged that Bush has not “been very forthright” about financing his plans and described his budgetary record as “abysmal.” This race doesn’t leave many options for conservatives concerned about the growth of government and its attendant red ink. ■

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How Do We Get Out?

“Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing,” wrote Rumsfeld a year ago. “Is our current situation such that ‘the harder we work, the behinder we get?’”

We now have metrics to work with. A year ago, Gen. John Abizaid estimated there were 5,000 enemy fighters. After capturing and killing thousands, officials now estimate there are 20,000 enemy. A year ago, there were two dozen attacks every day on coalition forces. According to Kroll Security International, the number is now 70 a day. A year ago, U.S. troops had the run of the country and the press could travel almost anywhere. Now there are “no-go” zones in the Sunni Triangle, and Sadr City is a scene of daily carnage. Outside the Kurdish north, few provinces are free of daily attacks.

With kidnappings and beheadings of humanitarian workers and foreign labor, many have fled the country. The press is now largely confined to the Green Zone, which has itself been subject to mortar and car-bomb attacks. American dead and wounded in July and August were higher than in the invasion months of March and April 2003.

Eighteen months after we occupied Germany, the nation was de-Nazified and pacified. Eighteen months after we occupied Iraq, Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise and, as Colin Powell now concedes, “We are fighting an intense insurgency [and] it’s getting worse.”

From 1963 to 1973, when we left Vietnam, Saigon was a safe city except during the three-week Tet Offensive of 1968. But Iraq’s capital is becoming almost uninhabitable for Westerners.

Spain, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and New Zealand have all pulled out. Ukraine and Poland are debating troop withdrawals. Seventy percent of Brits tells pollsters they want Tony Blair to remove British forces, the second largest foreign contingent.

Support for Bush’s decision to invade was overwhelming a year ago. Today, a majority of Americans believe the cost of ridding Iraq of Saddam was too high. Kerry now says Bush made a mistake going in and, if he wins, we will be out in four years. But, Senator, how do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?

Robert Novak cites Bush insiders as saying we may have to move to a rapid exit in 2005. Even Rumsfeld is saying we need not pacify Iraq before drawing down U.S. forces. But why then are we building those permanent bases?

On the credit side, scores of thousands of Iraqi police and soldiers have been trained. While some joined the rebels or refused to fight in Fallujah in April, in Najaf many fought to administer a bloody defeat on Sheik Moqtada al-Sadr’s forces, though al-Sadr was allowed to evade capture or killing in a deal negotiated under the auspices of the Ayatollah al-Sistani.

At the root of the insurgency—the goal of every enemy fighter—is a determination to drive America out. Our presence, our use of tanks, Bradleys, gun-

ships and fighter-bombers, causing inevitable civilian casualties, is recruiting more enemy than we are killing.

That the number of enemy and incidence of attacks have multiplied fourfold in a year forces us to one conclusion: we are losing this war. For the guerrilla wins if he does not lose, and the Iraqi insurgents are not losing.

How do we win this war? How do we end it? How do we get out without leaving an Iraq that is a far graver terror threat than any Saddam Hussein ever presented?

The Bush strategy appears to be this. Build up Iraqi forces to lead the assault on enemy sanctuaries in the Sunni Triangle, backed by U.S. forces and firepower. Attack and occupy these cities before January. Hold elections that will, by linking slates of candidates, produce an assembly that will maintain the Allawi government in power. Have the United States then give a date for withdrawal of American forces and begin the pullout of troops—to separate the insurgency from Islamists and foreign fighters whose end goal is an Islamist regime. Continue to build up and train the Iraqi army to where it is so large, powerful, and well equipped it can crush any rebellion. Cede maximum autonomy to Kurds and Shi’ites. And head down the road to Kuwait.

But as the success or failure of the Bush presidency hangs on the outcome in Iraq, it is hard to believe Bush will not leave behind sufficient forces to prevent the loss of Iraq before brother Jeb runs in the primaries of 2008. Iraq is thus likely not only to be the issue in this election but the next as well. ■