

# Tilting at Windmills

by Charles Peters, founding editor



## Above it all

Howard Dean's "guys with confederate flags on their pickups" is the latest in the long series of similar statements by liberal Democrats that demonstrate their desire to be superior. Dean was right in wanting to reach out to the guys, but wrong to characterize them in a way that John Edwards correctly described as "condescending." I believe this desire to be above other people took political root in the Adlai Stevenson era.

Too many liberals were for Stevenson not because he had proved he had more talent for governing than Eisenhower but because he was more intellectually sophisticated, and they were proving that they were too. From there we went on to "cops are pigs," "let those hillbillies go get shot," and "I loathe the military," and we were off and running.

The increasing prosperity of the educated elite has removed them further from the concerns of the average man, as have their failure to serve in the military, their growing tendency to send their children to private schools, and, above all, their disdain for religion.

## Speechless

The scene: a House Select Intelligence Committee hearing. The date: November 5, 2003. The witnesses: officials from the CIA and other national security agencies. The questioner: Rep. Rush Holt. The question: [after describing several examples of the military and intelligence agencies' "too-few-translators" problem, including the Special Forces hunting Osama bin Laden without knowing the local language] "Is anything being done to increase the pool of language

speakers from which the military and intelligence agencies can recruit?" The answer: Not a single witness could name anything that is currently being done to increase the pool.

## Admiring Cher

I never thought of myself as a fan of Cher's, but I am one now. A few weeks ago, she called C-SPAN's "Washington Journal" to describe the wounded soldiers, including a boy about 19 or 20 who had lost both arms, that she had seen while visiting the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She criticized the news media for not giving enough coverage to the wounded. She also asked "why are none of Cheney, Wolfowitz, Bremer, the President – why aren't they taking pictures with all these guys? Because I don't understand why are these guys so hidden and why there aren't pictures of them."

Coverage of the wounded has gotten a bit better since its total absence was noted here in our September issue. Not only did *The Washington Post* do a major story, noted here in October, so have *The Wall Street Journal* and *Time*. And *The New York Times'* Elisabeth Bumiller has wondered why Bush doesn't visit the wounded. (Of course, this front-page story probably will mean that Bush will pay the wounded a visit before this magazine appears. But that will not alter the fact that he went more than half a year without doing so.)

*Time's* Nov. 10 article by Mark Thompson reported that 1,513 had been wounded seriously enough to be flown back to this country, adding: "The most seriously wounded are flown to Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington,

usually on night-time flights." Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) observes, "The wounded are brought back at midnight, making sure the press does not see." (See the interesting letter by Patricia Koster on p. 3).

"People in the United States do not appreciate what's going on here," Col. Doug Liening, commander of the 21st Combat Support Hospital in Iraq, tells *The Wall Street Journal's* Yaroslav Trofimov. "It's like a horror movie," adds Capt. Nancy Emma, "I worked in a trauma unit [in the U.S.], I saw death in the face – but nothing like here. And those who live, you've got to wonder how they're going to make it back in the States."

## Drugless medics

The latest example of ineptitude in the District of Columbia government comes from its Emergency Medical Services. Here the good news is, starting about a year ago, personnel have been trained in administering emergency medications to the patients they treat. The bad news is that none of these drugs, not even aspirin, is available on the ambulances or the fire trucks that answer emergency calls in the district. When one contemplates the vast sums the district wastes on excessive salaries for its many public officials of dubious talent, it seems especially outrageous that clear necessities like these medications are not provided.

## Tear down that wall

"For the first time in almost four years, Israeli and Palestinian forces exchanged gunfire on the West Bank today as a wave of violent protest swept through the

Palestinian territory.” This was the lead of a report from Jerusalem dated May 15, 2000, that appeared in the next day’s *New York Times*.

That long period of calm should remind us that, in the wake of the hope inspired by the Oslo peace agreement and that famous White House handshake between Rabin and Arafat, the Palestinians were relatively well behaved. That good behavior only began to break down when they failed to see progress made toward implementing the peace agreement, and in fact saw Israeli settlements on the West Bank continue to grow.

If the Israelis really want peace, they should remember the lesson of this story, which is that they must give the Palestinians hope. Building the fence is not going to do that. According to the AP, it “would encircle tens of thousands of Palestinians, cutting them off from the rest of the West Bank ... The fence’s snaking path ... cuts deep into the West Bank ... [and] would cut off Palestinians from the Jordan valley.” The fence, by the way, is not the only barrier Israel has erected to separate the Palestinians from one another. It has built highways connecting its settlements and the settlements to Israel that cut through the West Bank and mostly cannot be used by the Palestinians.

### New cola war

I was delighted by a recent *Wall Street Journal* article describing how Coca-Cola’s domination of the Latin American market is being threatened by the indigenous Kola Real. The secret of the new product’s success is its low cost, barely more than half that of Coke. I am reminded of how Pepsi seized a big chunk of the cola market in the 1930s by offering 12 ounces for the same price as Coke’s six, and selling it with a jingle that went “twice as much for a nickel too, Pepsi-Cola is

the drink for you.”

### Operator ... operator

You may recall the cover of our May, 2001, issue that showed a chaotic chart reflecting the almost total disorganization of the various agencies that were supposed to respond to a terrorist attack. Then came 9/11, and we were subsequently told immense strides were being made in improving that sorry situation. In May of this year, the government tested the improvements in mock terrorist attacks on Seattle and Chicago that involved some 8,000 emergency workers, federal agents, and scientists. Of course, writes *The Wall Street Journal*’s Robert Block, “officials expected some gaps.” But it turned out that the gaps, revealed by a recent report from FEMA, were “more like craters.”

Among other problems identified by the report, there was “uncertainty over the chain of command,” the same problem our chart had revealed two years earlier; “medical emergency forces couldn’t get vital equipment” because no one knew who was supposed to provide it; and “federal agents did not pass on vital intelligence because intended recipients didn’t

have security clearances or secure telephone lines.”

All in all, things sound pretty grim. But one does have to ask if the attack has already happened, should we worry about whether the phone lines are secure?

### Bubba v. Dubya

Alan Ehrenhalt, the executive editor of *Governing* magazine, appeared recently at an AEI forum. AEI, as you probably know, has long been a home to conservative intellectuals. Ehrenhalt asked the audience, which appeared to be about 60 people, how many believed that Bush could have defeated Clinton in 2000. Only two hands were raised. No, they weren’t Tipper and Al.

### Yanks v. Hajjis

“We hate the hajjis, and they hate us,” an American soldier home on leave from Iraq tells Jennifer Harper of *The Washington Times*. “Hajji,” Harper explains, “is slang among the soldiers referring to the ‘hajj,’ a devout pilgrimage to Mecca. The term is offensive to Muslims, no doubt. That’s why it’s part of the GI vernacular.” Doesn’t

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## THE FBI TAKES ON THE WHITE HOUSE

“FBI agents have conducted the first round of questioning at the White House, talking to senior officials who may have disclosed the identity of Valerie Plame,” report Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough of *The Washington Times*. The agents, however, did not take sworn statements. Why didn’t they? Because, write Gertz and Scarborough, “lying to an FBI agent during questioning is a crime.” So, Karl Rove and all his co-conspirators were free to lie without fear of any consequences. Hmm.

that remind you of our soldiers' referring to the Vietnamese as gooks? The terrible problem in both cases is that some of the people whose hearts and minds we need to win are shooting at our soldiers, and that does not inspire tender feelings on the part of those being shot at, which in turn makes them behave badly not only to the people that are actually shooting but also to everyone who looks like them, including those who might otherwise be sympathetic to our side. Instead of making friends, we make enemies, albeit for the most understandable reasons.

### **Incredible growing bureaucracy**

The Bush administration has been busily "outsourcing" government work, giving private contractors jobs that had previously been performed by federal agencies. It has been difficult, however, to get a handle on the dimensions of the transfer. But recently two reports, both of which I learned about from *The Washington Post's* Stephen Barr, have shed some light on the matter.

One study, by Stephen Fuller, of George Mason University, finds: "Federal procurement contract awards to firms located in the Washington area and doing this contract work locally accounted for 43 percent of all federal spending in the area, while federal salaries and wages accounted for 29 percent. Two decades ago, the percentages were approximately reversed."

The other study, by Paul Light for Brookings, found that 50,000 civil service jobs disappeared in the period 1999-2002 while the "true size" of government, counting work financed by government contracts and awards, grew by 1.1 million jobs.

### **Labor pains**

In the June 2001 issue of this

**If George W. Bush is such a passionate believer in democracy for the Mideast, why does he refuse to talk to the one democratically elected Arab leader, Yasser Arafat? Certainly Arafat can be a pill, but unfortunately democracies do not always make the ideal choice, as Bush's own election proves.**

magazine, Matthew Miller described how the teachers' unions had sabotaged reform of the public schools in Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Now comes *Time's* Joe Klein, with a story headlined "How the Teachers Killed a Dream."

Bob Thompson, the Michigan road-builder who became well known for distributing \$128 million of his fortune to his employees, recently offered the Detroit public schools \$200 million to establish 15 small, 500-student charter public high schools in the inner city. The plan was based on the success of a similar middle school in Detroit and reflected compelling research showing that small schools are more effective. It was endorsed by the city's mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, and the state's governor, Jennifer Granholm. But the union called a work stoppage that closed the city's schools. Although the proposal did not oppose unions, or rule out their involvement, the Detroit union was disturbed that the middle school had been non-union. Its opposition killed the plan.

"The teachers' union was once a progressive force, but that day has

passed," Mayor Kilpatrick tells Klein. "And it's not coming back until the union realizes that we're going to have to make dramatic changes to improve education here."

### **Profit motive**

One of the nice reforms of the Clinton era was to permit students to borrow directly from the federal government, giving them an alternative to private lenders and providing a competitive yardstick, much like the TVA did for private utilities. Because this competition holds interest rates down, direct loans are good for the student. They are also good for the taxpayer, giving the government a 22-cent profit for every \$100 borrowed. On private loans, which by the way are subsidized by the taxpayer, the government loses \$12.50 for each \$100.

Since the government guarantees repayment of the private loans, they are a neat deal for the private lenders. Naturally, they have a deep distaste for the direct loan program. They want all the business for themselves. So they are, reports *US News & World Report*, bribing universities with rakeoffs and other incentives to require students to get private loans. The result is that 62 colleges and universities have dropped the direct loan program and more are planning to do so. The magazine says "the development is costing the US treasury as much as \$250 million a year."

Has anyone tried to do anything about this outrage? The answer is yes, and his name is John Edwards, senator and presidential candidate. He wants to end the government subsidy for private loans and make all loans direct, which seems to us the sensible thing to do. The big opposition to Edwards is coming from Sallie Mae, the 800-pound gorilla of the private student loan business, and the Department of Education, which Bush has

packed with former executives and lobbyists from the private loan industry. Perhaps he really meant Leave No Lobbyist Behind.

## Iraq's silent disabled

In addition to the wounded, 9,341 more members of the American military have been flown home from Iraq for "other health reasons," according to *Time's* Mark Thompson. Mark Benjamin of United Press International puts the total at 6,861—2,464 for non-combat injuries, and 4,397 for illness. Even Benjamin's lower figures strike me as disturbing, particularly since, as he points out, they don't include service members treated in theater or those whose illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, were not apparent until after they returned to the United States.

## Running in the hills

Relieved, courtesy of the FBI, from fear of implication in the Valerie Plame scandal, Karl Rove is up to his old political tricks. You will recall that he was astute enough to target West Virginia in the 2000 election, reaping his reward in the five votes that gave George W. Bush his victory over Al Gore in the electoral college. Now, a year before the next election, Rove has dispatched an operative to spend the next year in West Virginia making sure that the GOP repeats its previous victory. "The people of West Virginia are very important to us," Republican National Committee spokeswoman Lindsay Taylor tells the *Charleston Daily Mail's* Karin Fischer. The Democrats have good reason not to like Rove, but they should be willing to learn from him if they don't want to lose again.

## Peaceniks v. Likudniks

Not all Israelis support Sharon's provocative policy. "Tens of thousands" recently gathered in Tel Aviv, reports the AP's Jonathan Katz, "to mark the eighth anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, showing their continued support for the stalled peace process." AP's Ian James also reports that economic realism argues for peace: "Salaries have fallen 10 percent during the fighting, more than a tenth of the workforce is jobless, tens of thousands of businesses have shut down, and tourism has all but collapsed."

Peaceniks have progressed to the point that, according to Greg Myre of *The New York Times*, "a group of prominent Israelis and Palestinian politicians, working outside official channels, have written a symbolic peace agreement that they hope could be a foundation for future negotiations." The bad news is, Myre also reports, "the right-wing Israeli government immediately denounced the proposal, calling it irresponsible freelance diplomacy."

The fact that the agreement accepts 140 Israeli settlements on the West Bank suggests how far Sharon is from being able to recognize a good deal when he sees it.

Obviously, Bush needs to lean on Sharon and his colleagues. It is time for us to seriously threaten them with the loss of our substantial economic subsidy, without which Israel would have a hard time surviving and, if that doesn't work, to make clear that our continued guarantee of Israel's security depends on its offering a just peace to the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, Bush shows

no sign of being willing to apply such pressure. *The Washington Post's* Glenn Kessler describes the administration's approach: "The pattern is one of engagement and disengagement—a burst of publicity about new initiatives or special envoys, followed by policy drift and an unwillingness to push either side, especially the Israelis, to take big steps toward improvement."

## Stand by me

A lack of enthusiasm for the long meetings that are characteristic of government bureaucracies and many other organizations was a strong motive behind my decision to construct a life in which I was my own boss. That way, I didn't have to schedule any meeting that wasn't absolutely necessary, and even then, whenever I got fidgety, I could announce an adjournment.

I realize, however, that not all of you have been lucky enough to similarly arrange your working life. Nevertheless, I have good news for you. You too can do something about those interminable meetings: persuade your boss to move all the chairs out of the conference room. If everyone has to stand, including the boss, the chances are the meeting will move right along, and be concluded well before heads begin to nod in glassy-eyed stupor.

*The New York Times* credits this marvelous idea to Nick Braden, the director of the United States division of a French company. If you have to have a table at your meeting, Braden suggests that it be the height of a bar so everyone can stand around it. It might even be useful for recreational purposes after hours.

Open Letter to Hillary Rodham Clinton

As a staunch conservative, I am prepared to discard party interests for national survival.

Our struggle with Islam may very well become another 'Thirty Years' War.

Choosing you for president would stand Islam on its head.

800 million Moslem women have been degraded to:

Semen receptacles  
Brood mares  
4th class non-entities.

That a dominant power should have a mere woman as its chief executive officer would open the eyes of 800 million Moslems and shake Islam to its very core.

Go for it, Hillary. Please!

Nicholas Stephen Poluhoff

# 10 MILES SQUARE

"...such district  
(not exceeding ten miles  
square)...[shall] become  
the seat of the government  
of the United States."

—THE CONSTITUTION  
OF THE UNITED STATES

## Baath House

Cleaning out the Iraqi embassy.

By Eric Pfeiffer

A few days before Halloween, I went by the best haunted house in Washington: the Iraqi embassy.

From any serious distance, it looks like any other monumental stone building along Embassy Row, with its brick structuring and gated entrance. But come closer, and you see visible signs of rot: Cords of ivy slither inside open windows, stacks of unopened newspapers have deteriorated into wet pools of gray mush, and weeds, creepily, have overwhelmed the foliage in the front yard and begun to suffocate the sidewalk. There are literally cracks in the foundation.

The embassy was abandoned shortly after U.S. forces entered Iraq in late March. All but one of its employees were ordered out of the country, and it fell under the control of the American government, like Iraq itself. And just like Iraq, the situation at the embassy has been deteriorating ever since.

No lights were on inside the embassy, even though I visited at one in the afternoon. The embassy's entrance was shielded in a breezeway of dark, reflective Plexiglas that obscured any view of the front doors.



I stepped inside the darkened walkway and faced a large, wooden door with a thick metal handle. After three knocks had gone without response, I gave the door a light shove. It opened. My memory flashed to a skit from "The Daily Show" last year. Correspondents for the faux news program went on a trick-or-treat escapade through Embassy Row. Approaching the Iraqi embassy, the sky darkened as the soundtrack of a Bela Lugosi-era monster flick filled the background. But what was a parody last year has now become reality.

Faint sounds emanated from inside the 30-room, 9000-square-foot building, so I called out my

most pleasant sounding "Hello?" Several more calls and still no response. I worked my way down a stairway to the building's basement, which was covered with a glass canopy that had a single shattered panel near its center. It was very dark. At the bottom of the stairs, I found a dead bird lying on the floor, head twisted away from its body, the beak pointed toward a thick metal door. A large padlock had been undone, but the room inside was pitch black. At that moment, a stranger's hand gripped my shoulder from behind.

I swung around and stood face to face not with some threatening Lovecraftian menace, but a State