

Captain May – August 18, 2003 – unpublished essay:

“Armchair analysis of the Bush League war plan”

As one of the “armchair” former military officers whom the Bush League castigated early in the invasion of Iraq, I would to make a rejoinder on the part of my professional brethren who still wear the uniform – but for that reason lack the liberty to write on their own behalf. I shall use full liberty though, and a goodly amount of literary license. Permit me to borrow a device from the ancient historian Thucydides, who usually put the sum of the arguments for and against a decision into contrasting speeches between antagonists. In this dialogue I, a former general staff officer, will represent the military, and the Bush League captain will represent himself.

Scene: The prez and I are sharing a hand rolled cigarette when he takes a long puff then asks me, his joint chief, to leave the smoke with him and begin the first pre-war strategy briefing:

Sir, I’m pretty sure we’ll soon eliminate conventional Iraqi forces – that’s the good news – but I’m anxious about what will happen next. There will still be innumerable varieties of Iraqi militias. This will add the element of a protracted, guerilla war. We no longer have a conscript military that we can replenish with manpower as it takes losses from death, wounds and discharge – and almost everyone will want a discharge.

“We have a volunteer military now, sir, and we have persuaded people to join that military by supplying them a stable life. About half of them have houses, spouses or kids. If they are gone long, or if they suffer high casualties, we’re going to have big morale problems on military bases stateside and in military units abroad. They’ll want to take all that high-tech training we’ve given them and go work somewhere that they won’t get shot at and removed from home.

“We should consider the country’s mood next, sir. We believe that the country is willing, even eager for a revenge war...

“What sir? Yes, sir, so far so good.

“But they’re even less willing than the volunteer military to endure casualties and deprivations. They aren’t willing to mobilize the economy to support a long war that will claim a big part of the national budget.

Considering the above factors, we would anticipate some anti-war sentiment crystallizing into anti-war agitation at home. The rest of the world, you may recall, sir, is anti-war agitated already.

“There are also certain long-range prospects that should be examined:

“The rest of the world believes that we are trying to control the Middle East, thereby pushing our current world dominance further, and setting the stage for a century of global domination in which we intend to remake the world in our own image. (I’m afraid, sir, that they are aware that this is the advice of your advisors.) Other countries may actually begin to mobilize against us, or at any rate to supply arms and comfort to our opponents, the way we did when we sent state-of-the-art anti-air missiles to the jihad fighters when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

“What? No, sir, we no longer send such weapons to the anti-Soviet jihad freedom fighters in Afghanistan, sir. Why not? Well, sir, for a couple of reasons: the first is that we are currently in Afghanistan sir, not the Soviets, and the second is that they are currently fighting us.

“What? Yes, sir, that makes them jihad tyranny fighters now.

“Sir, we should especially pay attention to North Korea and Iran, whom you named along with Iraq as members of the Axis of Evil. I believe that they are going to be problematic because, you see, they believe that we are after them at all costs, because you and your subordinates have been using the arguments of World War II recently: that we must strike first, we must preempt. You see, sir, they probably suppose that your rhetoric is your reality, and that they are going to fight us. Since they assume that we are belligerent, they will assume a belligerent posture.

“Respectfully, sir, we must say that we would prefer that you not antagonize people we are *not* planning a war against, at least until we finish fighting the people we *are* planning a war against. Or, alternatively, if we *are* planning to go to war against your whole Axis, please allow us time to begin a much larger war plan, which we propose to name Operation World War III.

“What? Oh, yes, sir. You prefer us to refer to it as The Global War on Terror? Yes, sir.

“One last item, sir: The security we are seeking by rooting out terrorists is highly problematic, because the war will increase their anger towards us. Every Islamic public in the region will be against us, and they have a cultural instinct, *jihad*. (As we mentioned above, sir, we supported the jihad fighters who defeated the Soviets.) Well, the same kind of fighters, irregular, fanatical and evasive, will harass us during the pending occupation of Iraq, just as they do during the continuing occupation of Afghanistan. Worse yet, sir, we can expect a massive swelling of the ranks among the terror networks. In effect, sir, while we occupy Middle Eastern countries I’m afraid we’re exacerbating the very conditions that gave rise to Ben Laden and the terrorists in the first place.

“No, sir, exacerbating is not something forbidden in the Bible; you’re thinking of another word. Oman? No sir, Oman is a country; I believe you are alluding to Onan.

“Sir, getting back to the briefing... You see, the jihad reflex of Moslem countries is a historical phenomenon of note, and many military writers have observed it. Have you read about the campaigns of T.E. Lawrence of Arabia, sir? He proved that, in a desert climate with Arab irregulars, a small force could pin down a large force with relatively low-risk surprise attacks and the interruption of supply lines. And sir, our supply lines from Kuwait to Baghdad will be hundreds of miles long. Further, sir, there are campaigns by the Greek general Xenophon and the Roman emperor Valerianus that we hope you have considered. Xenophon tried to take the Middle East, failed, and barely got out. Valerianus tried, failed and didn’t get out; he was destroyed. Tolstoy, admittedly, wrote about the effects of a *tundra* climate on an invading army, but he might be a good read as we prepare to operate in an equally severe desert climate. One more, thing, sir: Clausewitz observed that...

At this point the Bush League captain had finally heard enough.

“Captain May, he said, “you apparently do not know to whom it is to whom you are dressing. I am the commandeering chief, and everyone who knows me knows that once I have made up my mind I never look left or right, because I know I’m already right! That’s called *commitment*, and I know I’m absolutely right when I say that the only thing that will save this country is if I’m *committed!*”

“I agree, sir, I added with a smile. He mistook it for encouragement...

“And as for that guy with the funny name, *Closet Wits*. Is he gay or something, and does he want a gay marriage, because if he does, than don’t mention him again! Well, this is a secret, but me and the SecDef and the Veep have been talking about what he’s said in some book or other, that war is politics by other means. Well, that’s all the strategy I need. *I’m* saying – and the whole Bush League agrees – that a war against Iraq is good politics! It will make the public feel good because it will get to attack someone for 911; it will make big business feel good because they’ll make some money; and it will Israel make Israel feel good because we’ll be there to share their burden. We’re going to be a regular clan of compassionate combat conservatism – and you heard it here first!

Y’all professional officers complicate this war stuff too much. (Have you been listening to Colin Powell?) Now, you may whisper that I’m just a politician, but my dad fought in a war and I used to be a national guard lieutenant! As for the SecDef and the Veep, they haven’t served in the military, but they know all the most important weapons manufactures in America. All of this means we’re a lot less dubious than you are! It will be *our* strategic plan, not yours, because *you* lack

commitment. Since I've started telling you what my sense of military reality was you've been giving me all this cowchips about manpower problems and *logic sticks*. Now quit it!

“Look, I know you're worried, because you folks who have seen combat are just a little skittish, and that's natural, I suppose. Heck, everyone in the Bush League had enough sense to know that war makes cowards of men, so we kept our courage pure by never coming within ten thousand miles of Vietnam or any other combat zone! Heck, we've never even been on practice maneuvers! The reason I'm imp-sizing this for you is because you need to understand that we intend to stay safe and sane no matter what happens to the troops over there, that way our judgment won't be clouded.

Here's the forecast, and I'm staking my presidency on it. The Iraqis will fold without a fight, welcome us as liberators, then chuck all their old, un-American lifestyle and become our best friends (next to Israel) in the region. They'll be as nice a prize as Puerto Rico and Hawaii – which we got hold of because of war, I might remind you.

So don't try to confuse me with all this technical, strategical and historical stuff. I'm pretty sure that Closet Wits said that when you went to war you had to watch out for the fog. Well, every time I listen to you officers talk about war, my head gets foggy. Maybe I only made C's in Yale, but I remember two lines from a famous poem. “Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do or die!” That's from the *Charge of the Light Brigade* by some Indian poet named *Ten Sons*, related to Hiawatha or Geronimo, I think.

I'm looking for the kind of blind obedience Ten Sons wrote that poem about, because that poem says it all. So don't worry about what kind of orders I give you, or what kind of force I supply for the mission. If you do, you're out of line and I'm going to pull you from the lineup. This is going to be a Bush League operation all the way, let me tell you, and I'm going to be remembered for it!

Now, one last thing: Quit thinking you're smarter than me. I've heard you quoting some rap artist you must have been listening to down in Houston. I think his name was *Nappy Leon*. I know you and the other egghead officers know who I'm talking about, because I've heard you repeating some line of his about it just taking a step to go from the sublime to the ridiculous. Cowchips! Take it from me: By George, by Mayday I'll announce to the USA, the Middle East and the whole world that we've won the war! That will be my sublime moment, and I dare anyone to say it will be called ridiculous!

Captain May served on the general staff of the Army's 75th Division, where he specialized in military intelligence and public affairs.