

Captain May – September 5, 2003 – unpublished essay:

“Iraq, from bad to worse” (an analysis of key Bush assumptions)

We’re deeper in the quicksand of Iraq than we thought we would be a scant six months ago, so clear thinking is more important now than ever. Let’s clarify the arguments by which the Bush team explains our current position and our future hopes of success.

Military intelligence failed.

Military intelligence officers are the perfect whipping boy for presidents, since we are patriots under orders not to contradict them so long as they stay within the Constitution. Loyalty is our core value, as it is for all service members. We keep our mouths shut and even try to force a smile when the commander in chief blames us for the mess he made for us. We’re taking the blame for something we argued against. Look at the record: Bush made his war plans before he had studied the available intelligence. He defended his war plans against those who defend America by shutting down, shutting out and shutting up the competent officers whose analyses contradicted his unstudied decision to go to war.

Ultimately, all intelligence emanates from the mind of the commander, and George W. Bush is clearly a man of limited intelligence. He prefers golf to geopolitics, made C’s at in college (and brags about it) and admitted that he was clueless about foreign affairs while he was running for office. He commits regular barbarisms when he tries to speak spontaneously, and the coherence of a leader’s words is a good indicator of the quality of his mind.

The UN or NATO will support our efforts to stabilize Iraq.

Yeah, and the check is in the mail. The world knows that trying to force a new way of life on a proud Arabic country in the middle of the Middle East is going to be about as easy as giving a cat a bath: We’re going to continue to get scratched while we naively assume that the cat will get used to the water. Would you help bathe my cat in the bath tub because *I’m* getting too scratched up and the water is getting too red with *my* blood? *No?* Well, to tell you the truth, I wouldn’t help you if *you* were trying to wash a ferocious feline, either.

The international community is going to stand back and snicker as we bleed. Cruel? Not really. If they had dissed us the way we dissed them, we’d be laughing out loud if they were in our predicament, the way we hooted our way through Rambo movies showing Steroidal Sly Stalone killing Ruskies. As far as the international community is concerned, we got what we wanted, an attack against a country that was smaller and weaker, that was a geopolitical pivot for a region that

we had chosen to dominate and reform, and that had the best resource on earth: oil. The international community (excepting Britain and a few mercenary countries we bought), was against the war from the start. Why should they be for it now?

Why? According to the Bush team, because they will realize that *we* have screwed Iraq up so badly that it is headed for civil war, and *they* have to do something as the region melts down. In other words, the cat we are giving a bath is turning out to be a wildcat, and may turn into a tiger – and we're yelling for help. It won't come. The only people eager to get to Iraq are focused fanatics who will continue to meet the Bush team's challenge to bring it on. They are able to kill, and they willing to die. Thousands *have* come, and countless more thousands *will* come. Americans want to live, though, and will have a hard time recruiting new soldiers who are beginning to think that becoming a soldier may mean becoming a suicide volunteer.

We won the war, but we're losing the peace.

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. We haven't won in Iraq any more than Napoleon won in Russia in 1812, or the Spanish peninsula a few years before that. We just won the first round of a long fight with an opponent who has more stamina than we do. The Iraqis were planning to pull us into quicksand from the start. How do I know? I didn't just infer it from historical parallels; I read what the other side wrote, as a competent intelligence officer is taught to do. It's all in *Iraqi Resistance Report IV* (dated April 6, and on the web). In it, our opponents stated that as America moved into Baghdad, it was putting itself in a perfect position for a guerilla war.

We entered Iraq with the deluded view that technological advantage overcomes every tactical adversity. Space-age stuff works well when there are clear lines and clean conditions, but we're stuck in the quicksand with the Iraqis now. At a certain point in all contested invasions, the fight to *take* turns into the fight to *hold*, and the holding is harder than the taking. At these close quarters, the will of our opponents is as much of a force multiplier as our night vision devices, smart bombs and armored vehicles.

We're succeeding.

Anyone heard of Pyrrhic victory? That means you win the battles on your way to losing the war. As a military intelligence and public affairs officer, I can read through the façade the media puts up over the reality of our current military position: We are having nightly firefights in which US forces have to leave defensive positions to suppress mortar attacks; we are being told that lots of helicopters are crashing, but this Desert Storm volunteer says it seems a lot like anti-aircraft fire to me; we are being told that twice as many soldiers are dying

from accidents as real action – I spent three decades in the service, and I never knew such a clumsy group.

The simple truth is that the tactical situation is deteriorating rapidly. The Bush team would like to send more troops, but they can't fade the political heat or the financial burden, so they act the farce of waiting for Lt. General Abazid, our commander in Iraq, to *request* more forces. If the Bush team thinks the public is prone to escalation, I'm betting that Abazid will be ordered (behind the scenes) to publicly request more troops. The president who shoved his generals out of the way because their worries impeded the war is now playing a game of deceit. We are on the brink of a historic defeat, and the consequent loss of the geopolitical clout that we may some day need to stave off genuine "imminent threats."

I could go on, but what's the point? Read your history of the region. The combination of climate and clans has undermined the efforts of invader after invader. Watch *Lawrence of Arabia* and see whether you don't think the past is prologue. It's time to start thinking *about* history and *for* ourselves. So far we have counted on a C student to figure it all out for us – and he has made an F decision.

Captain Eric May served on the general staff of the Army's 75th Division. On April 3, his "Visions of Stalingrad: Claim victory in Iraq now" ran in the Houston Chronicle's op-ed page. In it he predicted an American defeat in Iraq, calling our attack a bold leap into quicksand.