

or viewer should be inundated with gore. But when movies like "Saving Private Ryan" and "Black Hawk Down" arrived, they were widely applauded for the innovative realism of their battle scenes. Wouldn't it make sense that media depictions of an actual war at least occasionally adhere to the same standard? Is the decision to sanitize "War in Iraq" really a matter of "news judgment" or is it driven by business? Certainly, horrific images would make it tough, if not impossible, to sell commercials—which returned with accelerating frequency to the cable networks after the altruistic first few days of the war.

As a result, the pre-war joke, that this war would be the ultimate reality show, has come true. Its life-and-death perils are airbrushed whenever possible in the same soothing style as the artificial perils of "Survivor."

BBC, which is commercial-free, refused to turn away when blood splashed on its camera lens late last Sunday night during its first-hand report on the friendly fire incident that killed 19 Kurds. Then again, the unsparing first-hand written accounts of battle in the major newspapers—Dexter Filkins of *The New York Times*

described literal eye-for-eye combat near Baghdad last weekend—are not replicated by the verbal story—telling of many TV correspondents either.

Appearing recently on Jon Stewart's "Daily Show," Anthony Swofford, the former marine who wrote the best-selling *Jarhead* about his experience in the 1991 Gulf War, said he had shut off his TV after three or four days and "stayed with the print." For all the TV pictures, he noted, "the actual experience of combat doesn't make it to the other side of the screen."

He and Mrs. Bush are not alone in tuning out. By late March, cable-news ratings had fallen roughly 20 percent from their early highs. A war presented with minimal battlefield realism, canned jingoism and scant debate is going to pall as television no less than it does as journalism. At this rate, it may be only days before SARS sends Iraq into the same memory hole now occupied by the rest of the Middle East, assuming a resurgence of child abductions doesn't come along to trump them both. ■

Courtesy *International Herald Tribune*, April 12-13, 2003

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## IRAQ: A LETTER OF RESIGNATION

*The following is the text of John Brady Kiesling's letter of resignation to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell. Mr. Kiesling is a career diplomat who has served in United States embassies from Tel Aviv to Casablanca to Yerevan.*

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing you to submit my resignation from the Foreign Service of the United States and from my position as Political Counselor in U.S. Embassy Athens, effective March 7. I do so with a heavy heart. The baggage of my upbringing included a felt obligation to give something back to my country. Service as a U.S. diplomat was a dream job. I was paid to understand foreign languages and cultures, to seek out diplomats, politicians, scholars and journalists, and to persuade them that U.S. interests and theirs fundamentally coincided. My faith in my country and its values was the most powerful weapon in my diplomatic arsenal.

It is inevitable that during twenty years with the State Department I would become more sophisticated and cynical about the narrow and selfish bureaucratic motives that sometimes shaped our policies. Human nature is what it is, and I was rewarded and promoted for understanding human nature. But until this Administration it had been possible to believe that by upholding the policies of my

president I was also upholding the interests of the American people and the world. I believe it no longer.

The policies we are now asked to advance are incompatible not only with American values but also with American interests. Our fervent pursuit of war with Iraq is driving us to squander the international legitimacy that has been America's most potent weapon of both offense and defense since the days of Woodrow Wilson. We have begun to dismantle the largest and most effective web of international relationships the world has ever known. Our current course will bring instability and danger, not security.

The sacrifice of global interests to domestic politics and to bureaucratic self-interest is nothing new, and it is certainly not a uniquely American problem. Still, we have not seen such systematic distortion of intelligence, such systematic manipulation of American opinion, since the war in Vietnam. The September 11 tragedy left us stronger than before, rallying around us a vast international coalition to cooperate for the first time in a systematic way against the threat of terrorism. But rather than take credit for those successes and build on them, this Administration has chosen to make terrorism a domestic political tool, enlisting a scattered and largely defeated Al Qaeda as its bureaucratic ally. We spread disproportionate terror and confusion in the public mind, arbitrarily

linking the unrelated problems of terrorism and Iraq. The result, and perhaps the motive, is to justify a vast misallocation of shrinking public wealth to the military and to weaken the safeguards that protect American citizens from the heavy hand of government. September 11 did not do as much damage to the fabric of American society as we seem determined to do to ourselves. Is the Russia of the late Romanovs really our model, a selfish, superstitious empire thrashing toward self-destruction in the name of a doomed status quo?

We should ask ourselves why we have failed to persuade more of the world that a war with Iraq is necessary. We have over the past two years done too much to assert to our world partners that narrow and mercenary U.S. interests override the cherished values of our partners. Even where our aims were not in question, our consistency is at issue. The model of Afghanistan is little comfort to allies wondering on what basis we plan to rebuild the Middle East, and in whose image and interests. Have we indeed become blind, as Russia is blind in Chechnya, as Israel is blind in the Occupied Territories, to our own advice, that overwhelming military power is not the answer to terrorism? After the shambles of post-war Iraq joins the shambles in Grozny and Ramallah, it will be a brave foreigner who forms ranks with Micronesia to follow where we lead.

We have a coalition still, a good one. The loyalty of many of our friends is impressive, a tribute to American moral capital built up over a century. But our closest allies are persuaded less that war is justified than that it would be perilous to allow the U.S. to drift into complete solipsism. Loyalty should be reciprocal. Why does our President condone the swaggering and contemptuous approach to our friends and allies this Administration is fostering, including

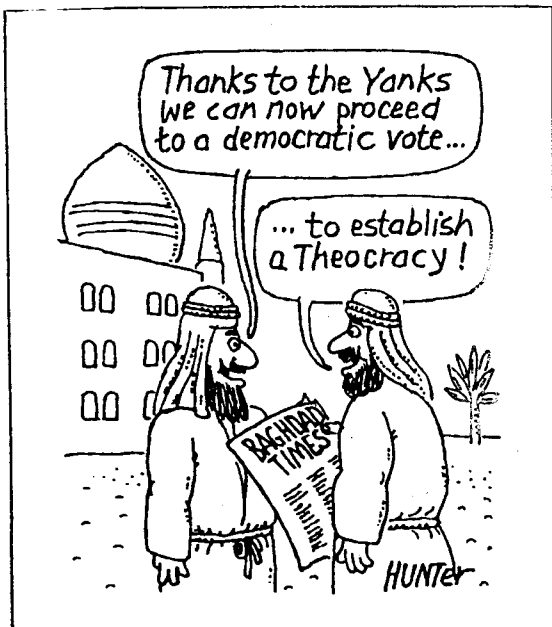
among its most senior officials?. Has “oderint dum metuantreally”? become our motto?

I urge you to listen to Americas friends around the world. Even here in Greece, purported hotbed of European anti-Americanism, we have more and closer friends than the American newspaper reader can possibly imagine. Even when they complain about American arrogance, Greeks know that the world is a difficult and dangerous place, and they want a strong international system, with the U.S. and EU in close partnership. When our friends are afraid of us rather than for us, it is time to worry. And now they are afraid. Who will tell them convincingly that the United States is as it was, a beacon of liberty, security, and justice for the planet?

Mr. Secretary, I have enormous respect for your character and ability. You have preserved more international credibility for us than our policy deserves, and salvaged something positive from the excesses of an ideological and self-serving Administration. But your loyalty to the President goes too far. We are straining beyond its limits an international system we built with such toil and treasure, a web of laws, treaties, organizations, and shared values that sets limits on our foes far more effectively than it ever constrained America’s ability to defend its interests.

I am resigning because I have tried and failed to reconcile my conscience with my ability to represent the current U.S. Administration. I have confidence that our democratic process is ultimately self-correcting, and hope that in a small way I can contribute from outside to shaping policies that better serve the security and prosperity of the American people and the world we share. ■

Courtesy *New York Review of Books* April 10th 2003.



Courtesy, *Private Eye*, April 2003