

GRAND TOUR

Bully Pulpit

By Bruce W. Cook



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I am hesitant to criticize, or even offer suggestions for that matter, to President George W. Bush on his present direction for American involvement in Iraq. Out of deep respect for the office, the burden and the man, I preface my comments with restraint of invective that I believe Americans

should employ—even the most vociferous opponents of George W. Bush. Many will agree that the vitriol has turned to venom. The polarization clouds the course frustrating the experts and average citizens alike.

Prior to the recent State of the Union address, Bush held a televised press conference in The White House press room to discuss the state of affairs in Iraq. To me, “Joe Citizen,” sitting in my living room watching the speech, one sentence stood out like a red flag in a field of snow. Bush stated, and this is paraphrased and truncated, “We cannot permit extremists in this region to gain control over the oil reserves in Iraq.”

To my astonishment, not one reporter picked up on this statement. Not one question was asked, no one probed into the meaning or ramifications of this postulate. From the outset of American involvement in Iraq, voices of objection have proclaimed that our military action was all about control of oil. The Gulf War of 1991 stopped Saddam Hussein from capturing Kuwait and taking control of additional important oil reserves. Bush’s reference to oil being used as a hostage on the world table deserves serious attention. Given that Iraq controls the second largest oil supply in the Middle East, is it in American, European, or world interest to have that resource in the control of enemies of the West? Those who hate America will destroy Americans, not with bombs, but with economic upheaval created by dramatic fluctuations in the price and availability of energy in an oil based socio-economic society. Is this justification for war?

The press did not ask this question. But sitting in my home, heated by gas, with cars at the ready, powered by gas, I asked myself if my country has the right to wage war to protect an oil supply to keep my car running, my stove cooking, my bedroom warm in winter? Might we be wiser to invest heavily in research for alternative sources of energy? For now, America and the West has a bloodthirsty need for oil. We can say the war is all about stabilizing the Middle East, freeing the Iraqi people from tyranny, eliminating weapons of mass destruction, stopping the spread of Islamic extremism intent

on destroying Israel, America and all of Christendom in the extreme. But it very much is all about oil, and the power of the black crude and it’s stranglehold on the economy of the world, particularly our world. In the State of the Union address delivered to Congress January 23, Bush once again directly addressed the issue of oil. He told Congress, America, and the world watching that the U.S. must develop alternative sources of energy that would reduce dependence on Middle Eastern crude, and cut American usage by 20% in coming years. Both sides of the aisle stood and applauded.

Our Arab allies and enemies alike were also paying attention. It is important to note the words and actions of a great segment of the Arab world beyond Iraq and Iran in the Middle East. The leaders of nations including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, and to a lesser extent Egypt, Palestine and elsewhere want America to remain in Iraq because they fear, rightfully so, the chaos and destabilization that will result from American withdrawal as the Iraqi conflict spreads its violent tentacles like the web of a poisonous spider. America has become both the protector and the demon along with remaining the great cash register/oil consumer lining the coffers of the region that resents our values, our politics, our very lives.

Presently, the American policy of limited military action does not appear to be bringing the conflict to a foreseeable and a reasonable end point. There are two extreme polar opposite choices; both of which are rejected by George W. Bush.

Road one is to plan an immediate strategic pullout of Iraq. Road two is an all out military assault which will produce extreme casualties and destruction, possibly leading to even greater world upheaval, including further assault on American soil.

Perhaps this is why President Bush has chosen to “stay the course,” terminology now extricated from the language of the White House press agenda. At this juncture, even a questionable limited course of action seems preferable to an all out war. Would withdrawal lead to chaos and possible economic disaster over oil? Ask yourself, if you were sitting behind the desk in the Oval Office, which course of action would you pursue? **GT**

Bruce Cook is the creator of Grand Tour Magazine. He is a twice-weekly columnist for the Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot, and serves as Editor of the prestigious Bay Window Magazine. Cook has been heard on San Diego radio for the past five years, and is an Emmy-nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.