

Wag the Puppy: New Twist in Media War

By Norman Solomon, executive director, Institute for Public Accuracy; syndicated columnist of "Media Beat" and author of *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media* (1999).

Some people are suspicious that President Bush will go for a "wag the dog" strategy — boosting Republican prospects with a military assault on Iraq shortly before Election Day. But a modified approach now seems to be underway. Let's call it "wag the puppy."

After a number of GOP luminaries blasted his administration's war scenarios, Bush claimed to appreciate "a healthy debate." The president offered assurances that he would consult with Congress rather than take sudden action. But his handlers were simply adapting to circumstances that probably make it impractical for the Pentagon to kill a lot of Iraqis prior to November 5.

Before initiating vast new carnage abroad, the White House wants its propaganda siege to take hold at home. Countless hours of airtime and huge vats of ink are needed to do the trick. Like safecrackers trying first one combination and then another, the Bush team will continue to twirl the media dials till their war-making rationales click.

The most widely publicized critics of attacking Iraq are hardly inclined to withstand the hot rhetorical winds that would accompany the first U.S. missile strikes. Objections from the likes of Dick Arme and Brent Scowcroft are apt to swiftly morph into pseudo-patriotic deference if Bush gives the order for the initial terrorizing launch of missiles against Iraqi cities. And history gives the president ample reasons to believe that most hand-wringing punditry will turn into applause when the Pentagon begins its slaughter.

Delaying war is very different than preventing it. In fact, many of the arguments marshaled in the mainstream media against a precipitous attack on Iraq appear to be accepting the need for the U.S. government to afflict that country with massive violence. Whether on Capitol Hill or in media venues, most of the criticism seems largely concerned with style, timing and tactics.

Quite a bit of flak has also come from pro-war commentators who want Bush to get his militaristic act together. The bloodthirsty editor of *The Atlantic* magazine, Michael Kelly, used his Aug. 21 column on *The Washington Post's* op-ed page to lament "the president's refusal to wage a coherent campaign to win public — and, let's force the issue, congressional — approval for the war."

While Bush huddled with hawks at the top of the pecking order, war enthusiasts were on the offensive across the media landscape. Their efforts added to a sustained volume of valuable news coverage. The mid-summer media focus on Iraq has offered tangible benefits for Shrub's party, including real progress in changing the subject.

The more that Iraq dominates front pages, magazine covers, news broadcasts and cable channels, the less space there is for such matters as the intensifying retirement worries of many Americans, the Wall Street scandals and specific stories about entanglements that link Bush or

REMEMBER 9/11



"...because when you waste time worrying about crooked ex-CEOs, THE TERRORISTS WIN!"

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Dick Cheney with malodorous corporate firms like Enron, Harken and Halliburton.

In August, the "healthy debate" over Iraq has displaced a range of negative economic stories from the top of the news. Bush's advisers would hardly mind if a similar pattern held through early November.

For the next couple of months, the president has domestic political incentives to keep "wagging the puppy" while floating a variety of unsubstantiated claims — like references to wispy dots that implausibly connect the Iraqi dictatorship and al Qaeda.

Meanwhile, sending more ships and aircraft to the Gulf region can be calculated to evoke plenty of televised support-our-troops spectacles. With Old Glory in the background as tearful good-byes are exchanged at U.S. military ports and bases, how many politicians or journalists will challenge the commander-in-chief's manipulative tactics?

Even if the White House doesn't sic the Pentagon on Iraqi people before the November elections, its efforts to boost pre-war fever between now and then could have enormous media impacts with big dividends at the polls. This fall, our country may see something short of a "wag the dog" extravaganza provided by leading officials of the Bush administration. But unless we can stop them, the full-grown dogs of war are not far behind.

Source: *The American Reporter*, September 12, 2002. <www.american-reporter.com/1929/29.html>

Maintaining Political Control

Under conditions of growing social and economic inequality and widespread popular disaffection with the political system, the ruling elite seeks to maintain ideological and political control by disorienting and diverting the population and channeling its grievances behind the “war on terrorism.” War becomes a critical means for maintaining domestic stability. In the name of national security and the exigencies of war, the government is carrying out a relentless attack on democratic rights, creating the basis for an authoritarian garrison state.

Wartime measures will be carried out not only against targets overseas, but against the American people. Already the administration has begun to criminalize political dissent. Anti-Bush demonstrators have been arrested, beaten and jailed for voicing their opposition to a war with Iraq. Bush has declared that in the war against terror, “either you are with us or against us.” The logic of this policy is to treat all social opposition to the administration as treasonous.

Source: World Socialist Web Site, September 9, 2002. <www.wsws.org/articles/2002/sep2002/iraq-s09.shtml>

Managing Domestic Crises

“GOP insiders say that the president’s political strategists led by Karl Rove have convinced him to make the war on terrorism his main political plank in the drive to try and reclaim the Senate and expand their narrow House of Representatives majority in the mid-term congressional elections this November. Having a ‘nice, timely little war’ in the early fall would also come conveniently close to the voting date as nation-wide boost for [Republican] candidates, these sources said.”

Martin Sieff, “Analysis: U.S. weighs dates on Iraq,” *United Press International*, March 22, 2002.

“It is of more than passing interest that the war-drum beating regarding Saddam and Iraq has had an inverse relation to the Dow-Jones Industrial Average; as the latter has plummeted, the former has intensified. George W. Bush wouldn’t be the first national leader to launch a war that effectively managed to divert attention from a shattered economy.”

Hubert G. Locke, a retired professor and former dean of the Daniel J. Evans Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington. “Iraq Attack Inane, Dangerous,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 26, 2002.

“You’re in some domestic political trouble, Mr. President. You need to change the subject. You have the biggest subject-changer of at all at your disposal. Use it.... There’s a luscious double trap in starting the war as soon as possible. Your enemies are delirious with excitement about the corporate greed scandals.... If you get your troops on the ground quickly, they will go berserk.”

John Podhoretz, cited by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, *New York Post (NYP)*, July 26, 2002.

“The shock therapy of decisive war will elevate the stock market by a couple thousand points.”

Lawrence Kudlow, economist, June 28, 2002, cited by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, *NYP*, July 26, 2002.

“This is not about the [U.S.] security. This is about domestic politics. The national security of the U.S. has been hijacked by a handful of neo-conservatives...using their position of authority to pursue...ideologically-driven political ambitions. The day we go to war for that reason is the day we have failed collectively as a nation.”

Scott Ritter, former UN chief weapons inspector in Iraq. Cited by William Rivers Pitt, “The Coming October War in Iraq,” *Truthout*, July 24, 2002.

“But if a case cannot be made on national security grounds, then one must consider the real possibility that the administration’s drive for war...is being pursued in support of a domestic political agenda, something that should concern all Americans, regardless of political affiliation. The brave men and women in our armed forces have demonstrated their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice so that our democracy can be preserved. To ask them to do so in support of politically-driven motives would disrespect those to whom we look for protection, but also dishonor U.S. democracy as a whole. It is up to our nation as a whole to ensure that is not, and never will be, the case.”

Scott Ritter, *Baltimore Sun*, Sept. 1, 2002.

Source: Center for Cooperative Research <www.cooperativeresearch.org/wotiraq/Ulterior_Motives.htm>



“An attack on Iraq...would also divert attention from a sick economy and the corporate corruption scandals in which Bush and his vice-president are immersed up to their necks.”

John Pilger, “Iraq: The Lying Game,” *The Guardian* (London), August 27, 2002.

Beating the Patriotic "Drums of War"

Interview with Howard Zinn, emeritus professor of history, Boston College, an activist, playwright and author of many books including *A People's History of the United States* (1980, 2000) and *Terrorism and War* (2002).

Anthony Arnove (adjunct professor, Rhode Island College): George W. Bush is beating the drums of war to invade Iraq. Why is this happening now?

Howard Zinn: I think it's because the "war on terrorism" looks more and more to the American public — and certainly to the world — as, at best, unsuccessful, and, at worst, a sham. The bombing of Afghanistan has gone on for almost a year, and we see no sign of Osama bin Laden, and no indications that we've uprooted any terrorist networks. So the Bush administration needs to turn the attention from a situation of failure to one of success. Iraq is an easy target, it is assumed, and a war there will lead the country to rally around Bush as it did after the attacks on September 11.

There is the political motive of winning popular support by creating a war atmosphere.

Also, a war with Iraq will help maintain the emergency atmosphere in the U.S., in which civil liberties are curtailed, for both non-citizens and citizens, with war being the convenient excuse.

Arnove: Politicians are again wrapping themselves in the flag and talking about freedom and democracy. What are their motives?

Zinn: The record of U.S. political leaders on "freedom and democracy" is so poor that wrapping themselves in the flag is an attempt to conceal that record. That record includes the starving of funds for health care, jobs and housing while huge sums are expended on the military. It also includes the imprisonment of huge numbers of people of color, whose desperate situation growing up is due to the very neglect of poor people in this country by our political leaders. Their patriotism is a way of covering all of that over and distracting people from these issues.

Source: "What Bush's 'War on Terror' is Really About," *Socialist Worker*, September 6, 2002. <www.socialistworker.org/2002-2/421/421_06_Zinn.shtml>

Diversion from Corporate Corruption

An attack on Iraq...would divert attention from a sick economy and the corporate corruption scandals in which Bush and his vice-president are immersed up to their necks.

Source: John Pilger, war correspondent, excerpt from "Iraq: The Lying Game," *The Guardian*, August 27, 2002. <pilger.carlton.com/print/114886>

A Classic Tactic

The regional *Schwaebisches Tagblatt* newspaper quoted Herta Daeubler-Gmelin, Germany's Justice Minister, as saying: "Bush wants to divert attention from his domestic problems. It's a classic tactic. It's one that Hitler used." Bush spokesman, Ari Fleischer, condemned her comments: "This statement by the justice minister is outrageous and inexplicable."

Throughout the current election campaign in Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has opposed U.S. military action against Iraq. The stance has proved popular with German voters.

Source: "U.S. attacks German Hitler jibe," *BBC News*, September 19, 2002. <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2269514.stm>



Who said this?

"Beware the leader who bangs the drums of war in order to whip the citizenry into a patriotic fervor, for patriotism is indeed a double-edged sword. It both emboldens the blood, just as it narrows the mind... And when the drums of war have reached a fever pitch and the blood boils with hate and the mind has closed, the leader will have no need in seizing the rights of the citizenry. Rather, the citizenry, infused with fear and blinded with patriotism, will offer up all of their rights unto the leader, and gladly so. How do I know? For this is what I have done. And I am Caesar."

Beware the Internet Hoax! Many thousands of people have recently been duped into believing that the above was written by Julius Caesar, or that it is comes from William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*. It is neither. The true author is unknown. See: <urbanlegends.miningco.com/library/bl-caesar-quote.htm>

War is the Republican's Ultimate Wedge Issue

By Matthew Miller, a senior fellow at Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA.

Republican political consultants privately know the surest way to stem the Democratic drift is for the war on terror to become the master narrative of U.S. politics. In their view, one of two things will happen in the next few years. In the first scenario, national security (and internal security) become the dominant issues, and Democrats, trusted less on these matters, revert to their minority status of the 1970s and 1980s.

The other scenario is that the public tires of the struggle, terrorism remains rare or there's a decisive "victory." In this case, Republican weaknesses on domestic problems come back into focus. These weaknesses were a problem in the 1990s but not fatal, in Republican eyes, because of the

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public's qualms about Clinton's character. Under a less-vulnerable new leader, Democrats should be able to re-emerge as a "third way" majority party.

As one conservative thinker said to me, "If the war on terrorism is not a big deal, it's hard to see the conservatives ever coming back." On the other hand, if the war on terrorism remains a big deal, the Democrats may split.

One benefit of invading Iraq that conservatives speculate openly about is that it will tear the Democratic Party down the middle, as did Vietnam. A peace candidate in New Hampshire in 2004 is the new

Republican fantasy.

It turns out affirmative action and immigration were just the warm-up. Now, war is the Republican Party's ultimate wedge issue. This is all that motivates the White House, but I have no doubt it is part of what motivates some powerful people near the President.

Serious Republican thinkers believe the only way for their party to achieve a governing majority is for the theme of war to be dominant. This is a fact, and whatever else you may think of it, it's a little scary.

Source: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 21, 2002. <www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/4119080.htm>

WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE AXIS OF EVIL

YOU TAKE CARE OF DOMESTIC DISSENT!

V8 → 1. Vote as you're told.
 I8 → 2. Gladly pay your War Tax raises
 C8 → 3. Don't ask questions. About anything.
 T8 → 4. Watch your neighbours. Especially foreign ones.
 O8 → 5. Forget what your 401 (k) used to be worth.*
 R8 → 6. Don't worry about the environment.
 Y8 → 7. Remember - Patriotism requires Blind Obedience.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTRY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Micah Ian Wright

* The term "401(k)" refers to retirement savings plans and is named after a section in the U.S. tax code.

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"Focus on War" is a Pre-election Ploy for Votes

By Al Gore, former U.S. Vice President.

President Bush is telling us that the most urgent requirement of the moment is not to redouble our efforts against Al Qaeda, not to stabilize the nation of Afghanistan after driving his host government from power, but instead to shift our focus and concentrate on immediately launching a new war against Saddam Hussein. And he is proclaiming a new, uniquely American right to preemptively attack whomsoever he may deem represents a potential future threat.

Moreover, he is demanding in this high political season that Congress speedily affirm that he has the necessary authority to proceed immediately against Iraq and for that matter any other nation in the region, regardless of subsequent developments or circumstances. The timing of this sudden burst of urgency to take up this cause as America's new top priority, displacing the war against Osama Bin Laden, was explained by the White House Chief of Staff in his now well known statement that "from an advertising point of view, you don't launch a new product line until after labor day." Nevertheless, Iraq does pose a serious threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf and we should organize an international coalition to eliminate his access to weapons of mass destruction.

I was one of the few Democrats in the U.S. Senate who supported the war resolution in 1991. And I felt betrayed by the first Bush administration's hasty departure from the battlefield.

President George H.W. Bush purposely waited until after the mid-term elections of 1990 to push for a vote at the beginning of the new Congress in January of 1991. President George W. Bush, by contrast, is pushing for a vote in this Congress immediately before the election. Rather than making efforts to dispel concern at home and abroad about the role of politics in the timing of his policy, the President is publicly taunting Democrats with the political consequences of a "no" vote — even as the Republican National Committee runs pre-packaged advertising based on the same theme — in keeping with the political strategy clearly described in a White House aide's misplaced computer disk, which advised Republican operatives that their principal game plan for success in the election a few weeks away was to "focus on the war." Vice President Cheney, meanwhile indignantly described suggestions of political motivation "reprehensible." The following week he took his discussion of war strategy to the Rush Limbaugh show.

Source: Excerpt from a speech at the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, "Iraq and the War on Terrorism," Sept. 23, 2002. <www.truthout.org/docs_02/09.25A.gore.sf.htm>

Whacking Foreigners Wins Votes

By George Monbiot, Honorary Professor, Department of Politics, Keele University; author of *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* (2000).

The U.S. government has several pressing domestic reasons for going to war. The first is that attacking Iraq gives the impression that the flagging 'war on terror' is going somewhere. The second is that the people of all super-dominant nations love war. As Bush found in Afghanistan, whacking foreigners wins votes. Allied to this concern is the need to distract attention from the financial scandals in which both the president and vice-president are enmeshed. Already, in this respect, the impending war seems to be working rather well.

Source: Excerpt from *The Guardian* (London), August 6, 2002. <www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,769699,00.html>

