



Sarah Littman

Bush in a china shop

As we counted down to the start of the war initiated by President Bush Monday night, those of us who had hoped for a peaceful resolution were left to pray for a quick end to the fighting, the safety of our troops and for innocent civilians whose lives will be lost in the hostilities and what follows.

It's clear that war is inevitable — indeed, it might have started by the time you read this. A piece I'd written for today, which deplored the bullying foreign policy tactics of the Bush administration has been overtaken by events. But not entirely, because my greatest fear is that this administration's failure to secure broad-based support for the war does not bode well for any subsequent peace.

After 9/11, we had much of the world on our side. Unfortunately, this sympathy and good will seems to have been willfully squandered by the Bush administration. The United States has withdrawn from several international agreements, including the Anti-Ballistic Missiles treaty and the International Criminal Court, not to mention the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and the expansion of NATO into the former Soviet Union. Although some NATO troops were accepted to help in Afghanistan, the United States allowed no shared NATO decision-making.

Career diplomat John Brady Kiesling, who left the foreign service to protest Bush administration policy, asked in his resignation, "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 metuant' really become our motto?"

A saying of Emperor Caligula, this translates as "Let them hate as long as they fear." We're doing pretty well on both counts. The Sunday Independent, an Irish newspaper, polled Dublin residents about who they feared most, Saddam Hussein or George Bush. Sixty percent chose Bush versus 39 percent for Saddam. In the U.K., Prime Minister Tony Blair has been Bush's staunchest ally at huge political cost, including a back-bench revolt in his own party and the resignation of his foreign secretary. There, a Sunday Times poll found Bush and Saddam running neck and neck as "the greatest threat to world peace."

Concerning hatred — well, we were seeing plenty before the Iraq crisis as a result of our incompetence and hubris in foreign policy. But when our president says, "There will be a certain sense of discipline" if Mexico opposed the United States in the now-withdrawn Security Council vote for a second resolution, you can't really blame people like Canadian Member of Parliament Carolyn Parrish for saying, "Damn Americans. I hate those bastards."

And these are our friends and allies. How must our belligerence and arrogance translate to those who weren't on our side to begin with? Not to mention our government's hypocrisy by going to war with Iraq over weapons of mass destruction while saying North Korea's production of the same is a "regional problem." Handling things this way, we've played right into the hands of the recruiters for terrorist organizations.

A recent New York Times article noted that many U.S. presidents, faced with the decision to wage war, have had private doubts, even if they displayed public certitude. There is none of that with George W. Bush. "While Iraq weighs on him heavily, [friends and advisers say], a president who sees the world as a biblical struggle of good versus evil has never expressed any misgivings, or personal vulnerabilities, about going to war against Saddam Hussein." One can't help wondering if the tenuous links the administration has been trying to establish between al-Qaida and Iraq are an excuse to send in the troops.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so sure of themselves and wiser people so full of doubt." The world would certainly be a safer place once this war is over if our leaders learn to show a little more doubt, a great deal more humility and substantially more diplomacy in conducting our foreign policy.

In the meantime, may God bless and protect our troops and help us all.

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