

Diplomats Unite Against Bush

by Swanee Hunt, Scripps Howard News Service, June 23, 2004

Diplomats look after our country. That's their job. They have to stay out of politics during their appointments and usually continue that practice after retiring. In fact, after representing the US government, they bring more wisdom to the foreign policy debate back home.

So when I heard that Diplomats and Military Commanders for Change, a group of 27 former senior diplomats, military and state officials, are calling for George W. Bush's defeat in November, I took notice. Citing poor policy and national security concerns, they're condemning Bush and speaking out against this "incompetent administration" (their words, not mine). This is extraordinary: so many high-tiered former officials coming out publicly against a sitting president.

"We felt things were so serious," explains the Honorable William C. Harrop, who describes himself as "essentially a Republican." "America's leadership role in the world has been so attenuated to such a terrible degree by both the style and substance of the administration's approach." That's policy speak for our standing in the world is withering. Harrop was ambassador to four countries (including Israel and Congo) under four presidents. He ought to know.

Not surprisingly, much of the group's condemnation focuses on Bush's mishandling of Iraq. Unlike our attack on Afghanistan, which had worldwide support and a UN mandate, our involvement in Iraq was poorly planned and undertaken with disdain towards the United Nations. To justify attacking Iraq, the administration manipulated unreliable intelligence about weapons of mass destruction and waged a campaign of intentional disinformation to link Saddam Hussein with al Qaeda.

Faulty intelligence-and misuse of good intelligence-is no small thing. The next time the United States tries to warn the world about nuclear arms, perhaps with North Korea, few may take heed. As the Honorable Charles W. Freeman, former ambassador to Saudi Arabia and assistant secretary of defense, clarifies: "Because of the casual manner in which the intelligence was used for political purposes as we got into the war in Iraq, the credibility of our intelligence internationally has become quite low."

To make matters worse, we were poorly prepared for Bush's post-"victory" occupation. His team underestimated the number of personnel, the cost, and Iraqi nationalist resistance. To fewer Iraqis each day, the United States is not viewed as the liberator we thought we'd be. The diplomats decry naïve assumptions costing some 700 troops since major combat operations ended. And for what? According to the AP and a poll of Iraqis commissioned by the US-backed government, over half of Iraqis believe they would be safer if our troops left.

Clearly, the United States doesn't have the "good guy" persona we had four years ago. In fact, Bush has, at record pace, squandered the world's sympathy for our concerns. Following 9/11, goodwill and support for the United States was at its highest. Even the most anti-American newspapers said "We're all Americans." Now we're in a hugely different place. There's such a widespread lack of confidence in the present administration's foreign policy that a whole new team is needed.

Bush claims we are safer after our involvement in Iraq. Truth be told, Bush has weakened national security by funneling resources away from the war against al Qaeda and towards the invasion of Iraq. US Olympic officials are even telling our teams to keep a low profile at the games in Athens when outside heavily guarded Olympic venues. Can we honestly claim we're safer? Imagine: anti-Americanism will force our athletes to be international heroes parading onto the stand one moment and skulking anonymously into the crowd the next.

The goal of any security policy, according to Merrill McPeak, retired general and Air Force chief of staff, is to increase allies and decrease enemies. Unfortunately for us and our children, we're doing the opposite. Though Bush has lately turned to the international community for help, this newfound cooperation doesn't reverse his movement towards isolation. Countries don't follow us anymore; they question us. It's hard to blame them, given what happens to our allies: terrorism in Madrid and Tony Blair's plummeting approval ratings.

These 27 former ambassadors, officials, and commanders have served under every president since Truman. Some voted for Bush in 2000. They're registered Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, and many are new to partisan politics. They spent their lives building respect, relationships, and influence for our country, and now they're watching their carefully constructed edifice crumble. Decades of work, gone in three years. It's no wonder they're speaking out. It's no wonder they want Bush out of office.