

January 4th, 2005

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### [An open letter to opponents of the War in Iraq](#)

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I am not writing to quarrel with your judgment about the war in Iraq. Rather, I am writing to protest your attitude toward the war. And the point I want to make is this: sometimes, you have to choose between proving yourself to have been right, or helping make a project succeed despite your opposition to it.

Since all our tempers are running hot, it might be best to illustrate my point with a non-political example: Imagine that a husband and wife are planning their vacation. One wants to spend it on the beach at Puerto Vallarta, and the other wants to go traipsing around Europe's battlefields. They cannot do both, and it makes no sense to try and split the difference geographically by spending two weeks in, say, Baltimore. So one spouse wins, and the other loses. If you are the winner, it's a good idea to avoid gloating. But if you are the loser, you have a very difficult choice to make. You can prove yourself to have been right by making the vacation as miserable as possible - by whining about the food, the weather, the lack of a DSL line in your hotel room, and by generally being a pill. Or, you can recognize that the vacation isn't nearly as important as the marriage itself - in which case you swallow your defeat gracefully, look cheerful even if you aren't, and do whatever you can to make the vacation a success. If it's a disaster anyway - well, next time your spouse may take your advice. But if you give it your best shot despite your misgivings, you will at least preserve the marriage. And - I speak from experience - it's even possible the vacation itself will turn out better than you had expected.

It's the same in politics. When a policy is adopted that you don't like, sometimes - not always, but sometimes -- you must choose between fighting it in hopes of proving you were right, or pitching in to make it work, despite your misgivings, for the good of the country.

Now, let's talk about the war in Iraq.

#### **Jolting Islam Forward**

Simply put, Iraq has become the focal point of the entire war on terrorism. That's because President Bush's strategy for winning the war, in addition to fighting al Qaeda terrorists wherever we can find them, is to spread democracy itself throughout the Middle East. More precisely, his strategy is to create conditions in that part of the world that will trigger an Islamic revolution whose objective is to jolt

Islam itself from the Seventh Century into the Twenty-first Century. In other words, we want Islam to do what Judaism and Christianity did centuries ago: namely, to reconcile with the modern world. If this actually happens in Iraq, the President believes, it will crack political ice throughout the region and trigger a chain reaction that will spread to other countries. And as the President sees it, only if democracy takes root in the Middle East will the threat of terrorism subside and will it be possible to finally end the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Now, you may be among those who believe that the President's strategy is absurd - that there isn't the slightest possibility of Islam reconciling with the modern world and of democracy taking root in the Middle East. Or, you may believe that the strategy is plausible, but that the President has made an historic mistake by choosing Iraq as the first Mideast country in which to make it work. Or, you may believe that it can be done in Iraq, but that we have gone about it badly, for instance by not putting enough troops on the ground in that country to overcome the Baathists and the non-Iraqi terrorists who are fighting now to prevent the upcoming elections from succeeding.

In the end, history will prove you right - or wrong. But as of today, we simply don't know how things will turn out in Iraq. Read the last sentence again, slowly, because it really is the heart of the issue. We are in the middle of a war and no one - absolutely no one - knows whether we will win or lose it.

What we do know for sure is this: our chances for success in Iraq will be greater if we all pull together to make it work. But if we fail in Iraq, the catastrophe of our defeat will spread beyond the Middle East and around the world. It will be taken as a huge victory for al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah and all those who support them, including Iran and North Korea, and the result will be a barrage of terrorist acts the likes of which the world has never seen, and which will place us all in mortal danger.

## **The Last Freedom**

And this means you must choose. Is it more important to you that you be proven to have been right, or that our country survives? And yes, the choice really is this simple. The fact is, we have gone to war in Iraq and the President who set this course has just been re-elected. That's why it isn't your judgment now that matters - history will settle that in its own time - but your attitude. And I mean this in the deepest, most personal sense. In his great [memoir](#) of survival in a Nazi concentration camp, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl wrote that

*“everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”*

To put it bluntly, your attitude stinks. You are so determined to be proven right that you are unhelpful at best, and at worst you are actively working to insure our defeat.

I am not suggesting that all politics be stopped, or that our democracy be suspended for the duration. Rather, I am suggesting that you recognize how much we are all at risk, and that right now you focus your energy, your experience, and your expertise on helping us to win. So, if you are a Washington big-shot, instead of complaining about the Army's shortage of truck armor, get on the phone to the Pentagon's bureaucrats or to the manufacturers and push them to boost production however they can. Instead of prattling on and on about the insufficient number of US troops in Iraq, call your colleagues

and counterparts in governments around the world and urge them to send as many soldiers as they can. Instead of whining that the upcoming elections in Iraq will be flawed - which is obvious, for crying out loud -- do whatever you can to make these elections a visible success. And if you are just an ordinary American who believes the President has made a terrible mistake, keep in mind that while you have every right to demonstrate against the war these demonstrations play directly into our enemies' hands.

## **Demoralizing Our Enemies**

Your help, or your behavior, could make all the difference, not just in terms of practical assistance but in broader terms of showing our adversaries around the world that right now, despite our different judgments, Americans are united. This by itself would almost do as much to demoralize our enemies as the accomplishments of our wonderful Soldiers and Marines in the back alleys of Mosul or Falluja.

Don't tell me that you cannot change your attitude, or that it's your right and solemn duty as the loyal opposition to oppose the President however you can. The War on Terrorism isn't just another Bush Administration initiative, like the No Child Left Behind program or his proposal to reform the structure of Social Security. In this war, our very existence hangs in the balance, and national unity is more important than political advantage -- or personal ambition. We are all in this together, as Americans, and we must all do whatever we can to help make the President's policy work, whether we like that policy or not.

And if you think that asking you to change your attitude is asking too much, give a moment's thought to what we are asking of the Iraqi people. After all, the President's entire policy rests on a change of attitude within the world of Islam itself. We are asking the Iraqis, and others in the Middle East, to abandon their tribal, if-you-win-then-I-must-lose way of thinking; to shift from oppressing other ethnic groups to co-operating with them; to move from totalitarianism to democracy. In short, we are asking them to make a mental leap from the Middle Ages to the modern world - fast.

That's a huge change in attitude to ask for, and the very least that you can do would be to set a good example.

*Herbert E. Meyer served during the Reagan Administration as Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence and Vice Chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council. His DVD on The Siege of Western Civilization ([www.siegeofwesternciv.com](http://www.siegeofwesternciv.com)) has become an international best-seller.*

**Herbert E. Meyer**

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