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The Scary Little Man

By William Rivers Pitt

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"He had a feeling that the answer was quite different and that he ought to know it, but he could not think of it. He began to get frightened, and that is bad for thinking."

- J.R.R. Tolkien

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George W. Bush, still smarting from his embarrassing performance in the Florida debate, decided on Friday night in St. Louis that volume was a good substitute for strength, that yelling would be mistaken for gravitas. The result was an ugly, disturbing, genuinely frightening show.

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In my [report on the first debate](#), I described Bush as, "Shrill. Defensive. Muddled. Angry, very angry. Repetitive. Uninformed. Outmatched. Unprepared. Hesitant." As bad as that display was, it

honestly paled in comparison to the frenzied hectoring Bush sprayed at 140 Missouri citizens who had the ill fortune of watching the man

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come unglued before their eyes.

John Kerry, by comparison, was every inch the controlled prosecutor pressing his case to the jury. It was, perhaps, that calm delineation of Bush's myriad errors which caused the Republican candidate to blow his stack. Exactly 30 minutes into the debate, Bush became so agitated by Kerry's description of the "back-door draft," which is literally bleeding the life out of our National Guard and Reserve forces, that he lunged out of his chair and shrieked over moderator Charles Gibson, who was trying to maintain some semblance of decorum.

"You tell Tony Blair we're going alone," Bush roared. "Tell Tony Blair we're going alone!" The disturbed murmur from the crowd was audible. Bush, simply, frightened them.

More unsettling than Bush's demonstrable agitation was his almost uncanny disconnect from reality.

The voluminous report released by Charles Duelfer and the Iraq Survey Group, compiled by 1,625 U.N. and U.S. weapons inspectors after two years of searching some 1,700 sites in Iraq at a cost of more than \$1 billion, stated flatly that no weapons of mass destruction exist in that nation, that no weapons of mass destruction have existed in that nation for years, and that any capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction within that nation has been crumbling for the same amount of years.



"My opponent said that America must pass a global test before we used force to protect ourselves," said Bush during the Iraq phase of the debate. "That's the kind of mindset that says sanctions were working. That's the kind of mindset that said, 'Let's keep it at the United Nations and hope things go well.' Saddam Hussein was a threat because he could have given weapons of mass destruction to terrorist enemies. Sanctions were not working."

What? First of all, the Duelfer Report proves beyond any question

that sanctions had worked incredibly well. The stuff wasn't there, because Scott Ritter and the UNSCOM inspectors destroyed it all during the 1990s, along with any and all equipment and facilities to make it. The stuff wasn't there because the sanctions put into place against Hussein prevented him from getting any material to develop weapons. The stuff wasn't there because Hussein stopped making it years ago, because the sanctions were breaking his back. The sanctions worked.

When Bush made the statement about Hussein giving weapons of mass destruction to "terrorist enemies," the needle edged over from 'Dumb' to 'Deranged.' How many different ways must one say "The stuff wasn't there" before George picks up the clue phone? How does someone give away something he doesn't have?

Bush continued in this appalling vein when he said, "He keeps talking about, 'Let the inspectors do their job.' It's naive and dangerous to say that. That's what the Duelfer report showed." Welcome to Bush World, where everything is upside down and two plus two equals a bag of hammers. It is naive and dangerous to point out that the inspectors got the job done in the 1990s, that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction whatsoever? No, George. It is simply the truth.



The mental disconnect reared its shouting head repeatedly throughout the evening. Bush somehow lost track of where he was at one point and called his opponent, "Senator Kennedy." He told one questioner that he would control the deficit by stopping Congress from spending, only a few minutes after defending the fact that he had never, not once, vetoed a spending bill from Congress.

He made an accountant crack about "Battling green eyeshades," a statement that immediately became a first-ballot

nominee for the Gibberish Hall of Fame. When asked what kind of Supreme Court Justice he would nominate if given an opportunity, he wandered off along a free-association rant about Dred Scott. Clearly, this President will make sure to nominate people to the bench who are opposed to chattel slavery.

Perhaps the most telling moment came when questioner Linda Grabel asked Bush, "Please give three instances in which you came to realize you had made a wrong decision, and what you did to correct it."

As with his April prime time press conference, in which he was asked a very similar question, Bush absolutely refused to admit to any errors in judgment, beyond a cryptic quip about mistakes in personnel appointments which he would not elaborate upon. He opened himself up to the judgment of history, a sad straddle given the simple fact that no President can avoid such a judgment. That was all he was willing to offer. Ms. Grabel did not hear about three mistakes. She did not even hear about one.

Bush was every inch the angry man on Friday night, which is dangerous enough. But to witness anger combined with belligerent ignorance, with a willful denial of basic facts, to witness a man utterly incapable of admitting to any mistakes while his clear errors in judgment are costing his country in blood, to see that combination roiling within the man who is in charge of the most awesome military arsenal in the history of the planet, is more than dangerous.

It is flatly terrifying.

William Rivers Pitt is a New York Times and international bestseller of two books - 'War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know' and 'The Greatest Sediton is Silence.'

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