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## **A Study in Constant Motion**

By William Rivers Pitt

t r u t h o u t | Perspective

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"We will stay the course until the job is done, Steve," said George W. Bush during a press conference in December of 2003. "And the temptation is to try to get the President or somebody to put a timetable on the definition of getting the job done. We're just going to stay the course."

"And so we've got tough action in Iraq. But we will stay the course," Bush said again on April 5th, 2004. On the 13th of that month, he said, "And my message today to those in Iraq is: We'll stay the course." Three days later, he said, "And that's why we're going to stay the course in Iraq. And that's why when we say something in Iraq, we're going to do it." In August of 2005, he said, "We will stay the course, we will complete the job in Iraq." A year later, in Utah, he said, "We will stay the course."

Got the picture? We are staying the course in Iraq. Period. No cutting and running here.

Not so fast.

This past Sunday, George Stephanopoulos put the question to Bush in an interview for ABC's "This Week" news show. "James Baker," said Stephanopoulos, "says that he's looking for something between 'cut and run' and 'stay the course.'"

Bush's reply? "Well, hey, listen, we've never been 'stay the course,' George," he said. "We have been - we will complete the mission, we will do our job, and help achieve the goal, but we're constantly

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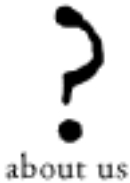
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adjusting to tactics. Constantly."



Press Secretary Tony Snow was able to blend the facts on this matter with true poetic voice when asked if "stay the course" is being abandoned by the White House. "What you have is not 'stay the course,'" said Snow, "but, in fact, a study in constant motion by the administration and by the Iraqi government, and, frankly, also by the enemy, because there are constant shifts, and you constantly have to adjust to what the other side is doing."

A study in constant motion?

James Crabtree, writing for the UK Guardian, attempted to analyze the phrase. "A brief search for the phrase on Google isn't terribly revealing," wrote Crabtree. "A study in constant motion is, apparently, a way to describe an obscure Michelangelo Antonioni movie, a description of a soccer game, and an advert for a rental home in North Carolina's Outer Banks. It is also, intriguingly, a way to describe the oeuvre of Scot's born film Director Norman McLaren, and the 'approach to global success' of computer giant Microsoft. It certainly, however, is not a description of how to succeed in Iraq."

Poetry notwithstanding, the Bush administration's handling of Iraq has indeed been a study in constant motion. Recall, if you will, the claims made by Bush in his January 2003 State of the Union address: Iraq is in possession of 26,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, 500 tons (which equals 1,000,000 pounds) of sarin, mustard, and VX nerve agent, nearly 30,000 munitions to deliver the stuff, mobile biological weapons labs, uranium from Niger for use in a robust nuclear weapons programs, and connections to al Qaeda that led directly to the attacks of September 11.

Yes, these claims can still be found on the White House web site. Yes, these claims do not stand alone.

"Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction," said Dick Cheney during a speech to VFW National Convention on August 26, 2002..

"There is already a mountain of evidence that Saddam Hussein is gathering weapons for the purpose of using them. And adding additional information is like adding a foot to Mount Everest," said press secretary Ari Fleischer on September 6th, 2002.

"Right now, Iraq is expanding and improving facilities that were used

for the production of biological weapons," said George W. Bush in his September 12th speech to the UN General Assembly.

"The president of the United States and the secretary of defense would not assert as plainly and bluntly as they have that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction if it was not true, and if they did not have a solid basis for saying it," said Ari Fleischer on December 4th, 2002. A little more than a month later, Fleischer said, "We know for a fact that there are weapons there."

"There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more. And he has the ability to dispense these lethal poisons and diseases in ways that can cause massive death and destruction. If biological weapons seem too terrible to contemplate, chemical weapons are equally chilling," said Secretary of State Colin Powell in his February 5th, 2003, address to the UN Security Council.

The study in constant motion truly began after these horrific weapons failed to turn up in Iraq. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously claimed of the Iraqi WMD during a March 30th, 2003, interview with ABC News, "We know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and north somewhat." Not two months later, Rumsfeld said during a Fox News interview, "We never believed that we'd just tumble over weapons of mass destruction in that country."

Ari Fleischer's tapdancing behind his podium reached mythological status in July of 2003 when, during a briefing in which he was pressed to explain why no WMD had been found in Iraq, said, "I think the burden is on those people who think he didn't have weapons of mass destruction to tell the world where they are."

Come again? The people who said Iraq had no weapons and posed no threat must be the ones to explain where the weapons are? Certainly, the myriad administration officials who promised that stockpiles of WMD were practically falling out of the sky in Iraq shouldn't have to explain themselves. That wouldn't be cricket.

The rest, as they say, is history. The weapons stopped being the story, so put away your plastic sheeting and duct tape. The whole point was to bring democracy to the Middle East by way of Iraq. Then it became about fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them over here. Then it became about us standing down when the Iraqis stand up. Then it became about standing as referee between factional

militias. For a while, it was about staying the course.

Not so much anymore.

Constant motion indeed.

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*William Rivers Pitt is a New York Times and internationally bestselling author of two books: War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know and The Greatest Sedition Is Silence. His newest book, House of Ill Repute: Reflections on War, Lies, and America's Ravaged Reputation, will be available this winter from PoliPointPress.*

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