

# When Dissent Was Duty

by Mike Hersh © 2002

When the war on terror began, W. Bush promised revenge. I mean justice. Well, he said it was justice when he told us he wouldn't rest until he smoked out Osama bin Laden and brought him back "Dead or Alive." Remember that? W. said he'd get bin Laden — like the old poster in Texas said — "Dead or Alive."

Until then, we could not call the war on terror a success. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and conservative Democratic Senator Robert Byrd said essentially the same thing: that our success depends on catching bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders.

They also called for consultation between the Congress and the White House. Suddenly top Republicans in and out of Congress went berserk. Democrats Criticize Pentagon Budget, Anti-Terror War, Washington Post: 02/28/02.

"Disgusting!" spat House Whip Tom Delay. He's "giving aid and comfort to our enemies!" accused Rep. Tom Davis of VA. "How dare Senator Daschle criticize President Bush while we are fighting our war on terrorism," screamed Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott.

This is especially odd of Lott who is on record saying: "I think the president needs to tell Congress what the plans are. There are a lot of unanswered questions here." Of course that was a different president, one who was actually elected. CNN "Crossfire" transcript of show aired 03/04/02.

Brendan Nyhan's Salon Magazine article "Bully Brigade" exposed what right wingers really think about our Constitutional rights and the system of checks and balances which the founders designed to protect us from tyranny and abuse. Bully Brigade, by Brendan Nyhan, Salon Magazine: 03/05/02.

Here are a few key quotes:

Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss. in a "Red Alert" press bulletin: "How dare Senator Daschle criticize President Bush while we are fighting our war on terrorism, especially when we have troops in the field?" Lott appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" program saying "any sign that we are losing that unity, or crack in that support, will be, I think, used against us overseas."

Rep. Tom Davis, R-VA.: Daschle's "divisive comments have the effect of giving aid and comfort to our enemies by allowing them to exploit divisions in our country." [Those are the elements of treason.] Quieting the home front, by Bryan Keefer, Salon Magazine: 03/01/02.

During a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Attorney General John Ashcroft attacked Bush critics' loyalty: "Your tactics only aid terrorists — for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies and pause to America's friends." Closing Down Debate: Ashcroft's Attack on Dissent, by Bryan Keefer, Spinsanity: December 10, 2001.

Not long ago, top Republicans considered attacking a President a duty, not a crime. Slate reporter William Saletan wrote an amazingly prescient column in 1999 called: "Yankee Go Home."

Saletan observed that during past wars, Republicans claimed opponents of US military actions were "sabotaging American morale and aiding the enemy." Saletan noted a profound GOP flip flop as President Clinton intervened in Kosovo: "Republicans aren't bashing the anti-war movement. They're leading it." How the times, they are a changing.

Saletan identified "three of the top five Republicans in Congress—Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, Senate Majority Whip Don Nickles of Oklahoma, and House Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas — [who] went on television to discuss the war." He summarized the Republicans' attacks on Clinton policies as follows:

The atrocities are America's fault. Nickles: "The administration's campaign has been a disaster. [It] escalated a guerrilla warfare [sic] into a real war, and the real losers are ... innocent civilians." DeLay also blamed his Commander in Chief: "Clinton's bombing campaign has caused all of these problems to explode."

The failure of diplomacy to avert the war is America's fault. Lott said "I had doubts about the bombing campaign from the beginning ... I didn't think we had done enough in the diplomatic area."

Nickles besmirched not only American, but also our allies blaming the conflict on NATO's peace proposal which he called "a very arrogant agreement [that] caused this thing to escalate."

Congress should not support the war. Lott and Nickles openly undermined the military when they voted against the NATO air campaign, along with 70 percent of Republicans in the Senate GOP. They led dissent and Nickles even ridiculed "NATO's objectives [as] ludicrous." DeLay supported legislation to overrule the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ordering the military "to remove U.S. Armed Forces."

We can't win. DeLay gave aid and comfort to war criminal Milosevic who he praised as "stronger in Kosovo now than he was before the bombing...." As this leading Republican continued, he sounded like Milosevic's press secretary: "The Serbian people are rallying around him like never before. He's much stronger with his allies, Russians and others."

DeLay criticized his wartime leader, President Clinton, claiming he "has no plan for the end [and] recognizes that Milosevic will still be in power." DeLay further undermined Clinton: "The bombing was a mistake.... [T]his president ought to show some leadership and admit it, and come to some sort of negotiated end."

Don't believe U.S. propaganda. Nickles said, "This war is not going well.... I heard Secretary Cohen say, 'Well, Milosevic miscalculated how, you know, steadfast we would be in the bombing campaign.' But frankly ... we grossly miscalculated what Milosevic's response would be." DeLay spun: "It is not helpful for the president's spin machine to be out there right now saying that Milosevic is weakening [when] nothing has changed."

Give peace a chance. DeLay called Clinton's refusal to meet with indicted war criminal Milosevic a "disappointing [failure of] leadership," and added, "The president ought to open up negotiations and come to some sort of diplomatic end." Lott told Clinton to "give peace a chance." [No, this is not a misprint!]

We have no choice but to compromise. Lott said unless the "bombing stopped [and NATO can] get Milosevic to pull back his troops" we faced "a quagmire ... a long, protracted, bloody war." DeLay said Clinton "only has two choices, [either to] occupy Yugoslavia and take

Milosevic out [or] negotiate some sort of diplomatic end, diplomatic agreement in order to end this failed policy." We're eager to compromise. Nickles demanded "a compromise." Lott endorsed Milosevic's position: "Surely there's wiggle room ... I think something can be worked out."

We'll back off first. Nickles: "Secretary Cohen says, 'Well, Mr. Milosevic has to do all these things, then we'll stop the bombing.' [But], I strongly believe we need ... a stopping of the bombing...." Added Lott: "Let's see if we can't find a way to get the bombing stopped...." DeLay, referencing Reagan's blunder that killed 240 marines: "When Ronald Reagan saw that he had made a mistake putting our soldiers in Lebanon. [Reagan] admitted the mistake, and he withdrew from Lebanon."

Set aside the horrendous inaccuracy and misguided predictions. As we know, Milosevic fell, in large part due to President Clinton's leadership. Forget the months of painstaking negotiations at Dayton and elsewhere led by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrook. These Republicans forgot all that, demanding President Clinton do things he had already done.

Can you imagine the uproar if a Democrat made any of these comments today about Bush's "war leadership?" I've tried, but I can't. Republican demagogues from the halls of Congress and talk radio waves attack questioning Bush as the equivalent of treason! Can you imagine the outrage if a Democratic president was "leading" an effort which failed to turn up bin Laden while his friends and relations cashed in — some might say profited? USA="Under Saudi Arabia," by Mike Hersh, American Politics Journal: 12/24/01.

The GOPocrisy is astounding. Saletan observed, "Republicans [claim] they're serving their country by debunking and thwarting a bad policy administered by a bad president." He predicted, "You can be sure of only two things: Each party is arguing exactly the opposite of what it argued the last time a Republican president led the nation into war, and exactly the opposite of what it will argue next time."

I wish that were true. Scattered, mild Democratic comment on the "war" hasn't approached the Republican attacks against President Clinton, Defense Secretary Cohen, and the US military command quoted above.

Democrats barely dare to ask for more information, and when they do, top Republicans accuse them of treason!

Why all the Republican rage when Sen. Daschle paraphrased our feckless leader? Because Daschle repeated what Bush said not what Bush meant. Repeating what the bogus POTUS says is treasonous if he was lying when he said it. Daschle's crime wasn't calling Bush a liar; it was taking Bush at his word.

Bush never really wanted Osama bin Laden "dead or alive." He helped dozens of bin Laden's relatives flee the US — including brothers Abdullah and Omar bin Laden whom the FBI suspected of helping Osama plot terrorist attacks. If Bush wanted to catch one terrorist bin Laden, why did he help two others escape?

It might make for an embarrassing meeting over at the Carlyle Group if a Saudi \$billionaire yelled at Poppy Bush: "Your son killed my brother Osama!" Our "friends" the Saudis yell at us a lot. USA = "Under Saudi Arabia" provides more analysis of this lucrative relationship between the Saudis and the Bush family.

Daschle and the Democrats are demanding answers at enormous political risk. In return, the right wing accuses them of treason. They are assaulting our right to know. Where is our media? They should be asking questions and getting answers. However, few dare to confront W. Bush as he carries on the Bush family tradition of squandering lives and covering it up with lies. Damn Daschle the Dissenter, by Mike Hersh: The Liberal Slant: 03/12/02.

For once Lott was right: "I think the president needs to tell Congress what the plans are. There are a lot of unanswered questions here." Every Congress has a constitutional duty to demand answers from every White House — especially one as reckless, corrupt, illegitimate, and inept as this one. Call it 9-11Gate, by Mike Hersh: American Politics Journal: 05/17/02.

As the Bush Administration bungles and sends thugs to stamp out dissent, people will ask more, not fewer questions. We've learned the lessons of Vietnam and Beirut. This is America. We will not sit down, shut up, and let our troops fight and die in vain. Bush must answer our questions, or we will make him and his party answer for it — at the polls in 2002 and 2004.

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