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Howard Baetjer's Rejoinder **by Howard Baetjer Jr.**

This is Howard Baetjer's rejoinder to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's [response](#) to his [open letter](#) of March 17.

Bill,

Thanks for your response. I'm surprised and gratified to receive a response. I had underestimated you.

You take five paragraphs to establish the legality of Congress's abdication of its Article I responsibility to declare war. I never challenged the legality of Congress's action — I think you all abdicated your responsibility legally. I challenge the wisdom and responsibility of it. It was unwise and irresponsible. The framers had good reason to require that Congress make the decision to declare war. It seems cowardice for Congress to evade that responsibility and imprudence to put such power in a president's hands.

When you seek to justify the Senate's abdication of responsibility to declare war, you say the following:

The Senate has performed its responsibilities with regard to a possible war in Iraq. By authorizing the President to take steps without further, piecemeal authorizations, sufficient flexibility is afforded to permit a timely response to unforeseen developments.

This is unpersuasive: "Piecemeal authorizations" are not at question here; at question here is launching a war that begins with "shock and awe" and follows with invasion by 280,000 troops. What "unforeseen developments" can arise in "a possible war in Iraq" if Congress refuses to authorize such a war? This is no justification, Bill.

You and I agree that

At the end of the day, what divides us on this issue are not legalities and constitutional niceties. We differ on the best means to address the threat posed by Saddam Hussein — for surely there can be no doubt about the threat posed by this brutal dictator.

And how widely we differ. You believe the threat (to the territory of the United States?) is large and imminent; I believe it is small and speculative. You believe that more American government meddling in the Middle East — at huge expense — will make America safer. I believe it will put us more at risk by further inflaming world hatred against us.

There are two other key differences between us. The first concerns our view of the appropriate role of the American government. I believe that role is to protect the lives and property of people in the territory of the United States. You suggest that it includes

the liberation of the Iraqi people, the foundation of democratic government in Baghdad, and the spread of peace in the Middle East.

Where in the Constitution is the U.S. government directed to liberate other peoples and found governments?

The final difference between us is the crucial one. It's a different view of the sheer capabilities of politicians and bureaucrats. You believe that American officials, once the destruction and bloodshed end, actually can accomplish “the liberation of the Iraqi people, the foundation of democratic government in Baghdad, and the spread of peace in the Middle East.”

I believe this is hubris. It wilfully ignores history. American governments have sought through military intervention to “make the world safe for democracy,” to liberate people and found democratic governments in the Philippines, Iran, Vietnam, the Balkans, and Somalia. Each time we have failed. You think this time it will be different; this time we'll succeed; this time our politicians will have the wisdom and judgment to mold an ethnically diverse and mutually suspicious people, whose varied cultures and histories we don't understand, into a stable polity their American conquerors design for them. This is hubris. It is self-delusion. No human beings have the wisdom and knowledge necessary to direct the affairs of foreign peoples.

Again, thank you for your response, however unsatisfying I find it. I'm inclined to close on a conciliatory note, but I can't bring myself to be conciliatory. This war is tragically unwise. It is

also shamefully un-American, both in the anti-Constitutional way the government has undertaken it, and in its imperious dictating to other peoples.

I wish you well personally, and hope that you turn out to be right, and I wrong,

—Howie Baetjer '74

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