



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

A New Reason to Go To War

by Sheldon Richman

President Bush acts like a teenager with a credit card and rich parents. He never sees the bill, so he just buys what he wants and charges it. The problem is that instead of rich parents, this president has debt-ridden taxpayers and a gutted military.

A few days before Gen. David Petraeus confirmed for Congress how overworked the military is in Iraq — Bush has now promised to shorten the tours from 15 to 12 months — the president was in Croatia talking about the significance of that country's and Albania's invitations to join NATO.

“Henceforth, should any danger threaten your people, America and the NATO alliance will stand with you, and no one will be able to take your freedom away,” he said.

Were the American people consulted on this? Are they aware they are now committed to go to war to protect Croatia and Albania if “*any* danger” threatens them? Is this administration filled with madmen?

Oh, I forgot. The legal eagles in this administration don't believe the president has to consult anyone before sending troops anywhere. In their view, that prerogative is part of the inherent powers of the presidency. The recently released 2003 “torture memo” by Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Yoo states, “The decision to deploy military force in the defense of U.S. interests is expressly placed under presidential authority by the Vesting Clause ... and by the commander-in-chief clause.”

As conservative legal analyst Bruce Fein notes, “In other words, the president may launch pre-emptive war against any state or nonstate actor by his simple assertion that U.S. interests require it. Venezuela or Iran could be invaded on the president's say-so alone to secure adequate oil and gas supplies.... In sum, the president has proclaimed the White House an uncrowned kingship.”

It's there in the Constitution — if you read it just right. Which is to say, if you ignore Article I's setting out the powers of Congress. Reading that section will fool you into believing

that Congress has lots to say about warmaking and the military. How “quaint,” as this administration once referred to the Geneva Conventions.

This is where the imperial mindset gets you. The Bush administration might try to sell his views on the unitary executive as a government-streamlining program. Why have three branches of government if one will do? Think of all the money the taxpayers could save! It’s a deficit-slashing measure.

But seriously, where is the outrage? Bush already has U.S. troops bogged down in two open-ended occupations, at a cost of more than \$10 billion a month. *Ten billion dollars every 30 days!* We mere taxpayers can’t get our minds around that idea. Preoccupied with our petty concerns, such as raising our children and saving for retirement, we actually think we have better things to do with *our* money. That’s why we need wise leaders; they see the bigger picture.

More than 4,000 American troops have been killed in Iraq. Thousands more lives have been ruined. Tens of thousands of Iraqis civilians have been killed and maimed. The surge in Iraq has been so successful that American bombers had to be called in to put down the Shi’ites in Basra — Shi’ites who were resisting a Shi’ite-led government with close ties to Iran, the bogeyman of the Middle East. In Baghdad, residents were fleeing with as many personal belongings as they could carry because of the violence. The Green Zone, where the Iraqi government and American officials are hunkered down, has been under Shi’ite attack.

Meanwhile, American officials — and Republican standard-bearer John McCain — talk up the threat of Sunni al-Qaeda. Well, we can forgive McCain; despite constant reminders, he thinks al-Qaeda is Shi’ite and taking its orders from Iran.

While Bush, McCain, and the rest of the war chorus tout signs that the surge is working, it has become clear that by the end of the year, there will be more U.S. troops in Iraq than were there before the surge began. This, by administration standards, is success. Stay the course, they say.

And in the midst of all this, President Bush is finding new reasons to send Americans into combat, oblivious to the fact that if you bring NATO, that Cold War relic, up to Russia’s doorstep, the Russians may not believe it’s the Welcome Wagon.

When will this idiocy stop?

*Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation, author of **Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State**, and editor of [The Freeman](#) magazine. Visit his blog “Free Association” at www.sheldonrichman.com.*

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