

Albert M. Nixon

WITH HIS SPEECH to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, Al Gore stunned his running mate Joe Lieberman, and the editors of *The New Republic*.

"Speechless" is how the house organ of the Gore campaign titled its lead editorial.

"In the 1980s and 1990s," wrote TNR, "Al Gore consistently battled the irresponsibility and incoherence of foreign affairs that plagued the Democratic Party. And it was partly out of admiration for that difficult and principled work that this magazine twice endorsed him for president."

San Francisco, however, "sounded like a political broadside against a President who Gore no doubt feels occupies a post that he himself deserves. But bitterness is not a policy position."

Yet, watching Gore live, his speech seemed less marked by the bitterness of a candidate who believes he was robbed, than by the canny calculation of a poker player who believes he is drawing to a winning hand—but not until two more cards are dealt.

Had Gore signed on to Bush's war, as Gephardt, Lieberman, and Edwards have done, how would it have availed him? Does TNR think that if U.S. Marines are patrolling Baghdad's streets by spring, George Bush will share the glory?

Politically, no one can get to the right of a president who, in Kevin Phillips' phrase, makes Barry Goldwater sound like Mahatma Gandhi. The coming war on Iraq will be "Bush's War," and for the consequences of the peace, Bush will be held accountable.

Gore knows this. By offering Democrats a choice, not an echo, he shows some of the savvy of another candidate

who believed the presidency had been stolen from him, and who gambled and won the White House in 1968: Richard M. Nixon.

Nixon used to counsel Republican candidates: Run to the right in the primaries and to the center in the general. In Gore's party, the way to upend an establishment choice is the way George McGovern did it: Rally the Left.

And the issue about which the Left cares most passionately is peace. Has Gore then become a McGovernite dove?

By no means. What he just did preempted Vermont's Howard Dean, an attractive antiwar candidate and Sen. John Kerry, who was moving to position himself as Bush's leading critic on the war. As for Tom Daschle, he is in a box and shows it. The nation backs Bush, wants Congress to authorize war, and will punish those who refuse to give Bush the power to launch war. For Daschle's Democrats to defy the president means the loss of both Houses in four weeks. But to vote for a war the Left opposes is to make them Poodles of Perle.

To save their seats, Democrats are resignedly signing on to a rewrite of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, agonizingly aware that in 2004 their votes will be far less impressive than Gore's defiance.

Yet, Gore's speech was risky. The Israeli Lobby for which TNR is a conscious echo has been among Gore's strongest supporters. It is wild for war and exhilarated by the prospect of America smashing half a dozen Arab

radical and rogue regimes as well as Tehran, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, the Democratic Leadership Council is surely appalled to see the party front-runner cede to George W. Bush the patriot card in 2002.

But Al Gore is not running in 2002. He is running in 2004, and while there is a near certainty the United States will crush Iraq and Bush could be at 90% again in six months, in 2004, it will not be America's victory people are talking about, but the complications and costs of America's empire. While there is irrational exuberance today about "democratizing" the Islamic world, this enterprise is about as likely to succeed as was LBJ's grand scheme to "build a Great Society on the Mekong."

Gore's stand in opposition to preemptive war has already begun to pay dividends. Edward Kennedy and Bill Clinton have taken the same stand, giving Gore the aspect of a leader, not a loner. Critics who derided Gore for deferring to consultants now credit him for courage and independence. And the Hollywood Left, whose cash and concerts will be crucial when campaign reform takes hold, has been impressed by Gore's break with Bush on the peace issue.

As war looms, look for Gore to move patriotically beside Bush as Commander-in-Chief, while dissenting from the First Diplomat on his failure to create a great war coalition. And when the war is won and "sorrows come...not single spies, But in battalions," look for Gore to challenge Bush for squandering the sacrifices of our fighting sons, as another former Vice President did in 1968. ■

[what would kant say?]

Iraq: The Case Against Preemptive War

The administration's claim of a right to overthrow regimes it considers hostile is extraordinary—and one the world will soon find intolerable.

By Paul W. Schroeder

MOST AMERICANS SEEM little concerned at the prospect of an American war on Iraq. This is surprising considering that, of America's friends and allies, only Israel openly supports it, while other states in the Middle East, including longtime rivals and enemies of Iraq, warn against it, and the Europeans view it with alarm and growing frustration. Those challenges to the planned war now being raised, moreover, tend to center on prudential questions—whether the proposed attack will work and what short-term risks and collateral damage might be involved—rather than on whether the war itself is a good idea.

The practical risks are indeed serious. The attack would entail a new military campaign while the so-called war against al-Qaeda and terrorism is far from over, involving many thousands of American troops in ground fighting with corresponding casualties, fought with few allies or none, and paid for

entirely by the United States in troubled economic times. Across the Muslim world hostility toward America is already inflamed, and radical Islamic movements are active. The global economy—particularly the oil and stock markets—is vulnerable to shock. Such a war would also come at a time when America's alliances in Europe and the Middle East are strained, certain fragile Middle Eastern and South Asian regimes are at risk, and other international dangers (tensions between India and Pakistan, North and South Korea, and China and Taiwan, and economic crisis in Latin America, to name a few) are looming. If the war succeeds in toppling Hussein, the United States will be saddled with the new responsibilities of occupying, administering, rebuilding, democratizing, and stabilizing Iraq (beyond its existing responsibilities in Afghanistan), tasks of unreckoned costs and manifold difficulties for which neither the American public nor

the administration have demonstrated much understanding, skill, or stomach. In the light of all this, the enterprise merely on practical grounds looks remarkably rash.

Yet even these grave considerations should not take priority over questions of principle: do we have a right to wage preemptive war against Iraq to overthrow its regime? Would this be a necessary and just war? What long-range effects would it have on the international system? If the answers to these questions make this truly a necessary and just war, Americans ought to be willing to make sacrifices and undergo risks for it.

On these critical issues the administration has so far won by default. The assumption that a war to overthrow Hussein would be a just war and one that, if it succeeded without excessive negative side effects, would serve everyone's interests has gone largely unchallenged, at least in the