

when all these speculator jerks do it, the whole hood is hosed.

“Oh, yeah, I came by to mention that in June the mortgage rates reset. Bush put this new guy in at the Fed, Ben Bernanke, and he’s raised interest rates. So that will push up the payment.”

**Voice Mail, June 2007**

“It’s Travis. Sorry to hear about you having to sell both your cars to make that new monthly nut. Taking the bus to work in that heat, man, that’s rough.

“But, that’s all history. I’ve got great news! I sold the house next door to the Section 8 grandma. I only got what we paid for it, but I figure that was the smart play. She didn’t think she could qualify for the mortgage, but I told her to add up the income of all the people who have ever stayed in her house and put that down as the household income. Did you think Washington Mutual would be so racist as to question how she could have an income of \$160,000?

“Don’t thank me for getting you out of that monthly payment. It’s the least I could do for you, bro.”

**Phone call, October 2008**

“It’s me, Travis. Long time no hear! Hey, I’m sorry about house prices in your zip code being down 55 percent. Bummer.

“Anyway, I’ve been listening to Obama’s speeches about how he is going to invest hundreds of billions to make America energy independent in ten years. So I wanted to let you in on the next big thing. Alternative energy! It’s going to be bigger than houses. I’ve got great investments lined up with some start-ups like biodiesel trolleys. Al Gore is this close to making a big investment. I just need a little help making the minimum required investment. So, are you in or are you out? Remember, quitters never prosper.”

You say: “I quit.” ■

There is considerable debate about what the Bush Doctrine actually means, but it is generally accepted that the United States reserves the right to act unilaterally and pre-emptively against security threats. By extension, the U.S. military overseas is also covered by the same principle of “force protection,” meaning that commanders can order incursions into countries with whom the United States is not at war to punish parties for attacks against American military personnel. With the recent attack on Syria, the United States is now engaging in undeclared cross-border military operations in three countries: Pakistan, Syria, and Somalia. At one time, such incursions would have been considered acts of war, even war crimes. But the Bush administration has successfully rewritten the rules.

One reason there has been so little outrage over the Syria attack is that sometimes there are secret inter-state agreements that serve as a basis for the military action. Though the incursions are violations of sovereignty, they are frequently carried out with the consent and the co-operation of local governments or intelligence services.

Damascus has been co-operating in controlling the flow of jihadis across its border into Iraq, even the U.S. command has conceded that the movement is now little more than a trickle. On one level, then, military incursion makes no sense. But sources are reporting that the U.S. attack on the al-Sukkari farm was secretly approved by the Syrian intelligence service, which provided information on the location of the target. Damascus was unwilling to act unilaterally against al-Qaeda activist Abu Ghadiya but was willing to look the other way while Washington struck.

Pakistan is a similar case. Its government, under increasing pressure from the media and opposition politicians, has again called for an end to U.S. attacks from across the border in Afghanistan. But Islamabad is secretly co-operating with American forces. More than 15 strikes by drones and helicopter-borne commandoes over the past month have killed not only numerous civilians, but several senior Taliban and al-Qaeda as well. The missions have been carried out with the permission of Pakistan’s chief of staff Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who two months ago met with his U.S. counterpart Admiral Mike Mullen to work out a secret *modus vivendi*. Kayani agreed to establish a hotline to approve specific operations where there was actionable intelligence on targets inside Pakistan, and he has done so, though he made clear that his government would not publicly approve America’s incursions.

The beleaguered government of Somalia lacks the resources to go after local extremists. It has therefore permitted the United States to land Special Forces in nearby Djibouti, direct fire from warships offshore, and stage helicopter raids to apprehend or kill leading militants. Drones from Djibouti also operate over the country and there are high-tech CIA listening posts on offshore islands to monitor seaborne movements of suspected terrorists.

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# When Elephants Forget

If the Republican Party “were a dog food,” says Rep. Tom Davis, “they would take us off the shelf.” Bush’s approval is 25 percent. Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton

left office with ratings more than twice as high. But while John McCain and others have deplored Bush’s failures, what, exactly, did he do wrong? What were the policy blunders to which Republicans vehemently objected at the time?

That Bush is a big-government Republican is undeniable. His two great social-spending initiatives, prescription-drug benefits for seniors under Medicare and No Child Left Behind, so testify. But how many Republicans opposed Bush on these initiatives? How many have called for the abolition of either program, or for raising payroll taxes to pay for prescription drugs?

True, Bush sought amnesty for illegal aliens and backs the free-trade globalism that exported our manufacturing base and up to 4 million jobs. But McCain was even more enthusiastic about both. Does the party dissent on free trade and mass immigration?

Two-thirds of Americans now believe that the Iraq War was a mistake. Yet all but a few Republicans backed the war. At the time of “Mission Accomplished” in May 2003, the nation gave Bush a 90 percent approval rating, as his father had after Desert Storm.

What turned America against the war was not the decision to invade, oust Saddam, destroy the weapons of mass destruction, and depart, but the long, bloody slog, the five-year war with nearly 5,000 American dead that Iraq became. It was not the lightning war of Tommy Franks, with journalists riding tanks into Baghdad, that soured Amer-

ica, but the unanticipated duration and cost. Yet Republicans still believe that the war was not a mistake, only mishandled. And now that General Petraeus has gotten it right in Iraq, they say, we should pursue the Petraeus policy in Afghanistan.

How many Republicans have repudiated the Bush Doctrine that got us into Iraq—the belief that only by making the world democratic can we keep America secure and free? Americans no longer believe that, if ever they did. And history proves them right.

For Iraq has never been democratic and America has always been free. Yet the Republican Party has never renounced the Bush Doctrine. Indeed, it is being applied today in Afghanistan. That war, too, after we failed at Tora Bora to capture or kill bin Laden, has become a long slog to create a democratic Afghanistan, which, like a democratic Iraq, has never existed.

In Afghanistan, we are entering the eighth year of war with victory further away than ever. The Taliban grows stronger. U.S. casualties are surging. Opium exports are breaking records. Our NATO allies grow weary. Even the Brits are talking of reconciliation with the Taliban, perhaps accepting a dictator.

These two wars helped to cripple the Bush presidency and end the GOP ascendancy. Yet at the highest levels of the party, one hears no serious questioning of the ideology that produced these wars. McCain pledged to stay in Iraq until “victory” and send 10,000 more troops to Afghanistan.

Nor have Republicans objected to the U.S. air strikes that have killed hundreds of Afghans, or the Predator strikes that have inflamed Pakistan, or the helicopter raid into Syria that humiliated Damascus and enraged the population. If Republicans disagree with these policies and actions, their voices are muted.

Bush is for facing down Russia and bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Does any Republican disagree? McCain was more hawkish than Bush when it came to Moscow.

The party says it is losing because the economy went south. But who caused that? Was it not because Republicans colluded with Democrats to push “affordable housing,” subprime mortgages, for folks who could not afford houses? Is the GOP prepared to demand tough terms for home loans?

Was it not GOP presidents who appointed the Fed chairmen who pumped up the money supply and created the bubble? How many Republicans objected to the easy money when the going was good?

In this election, the country wished to be rid of the Bush policies and the Bush presidency. But where does the Republican Party think Bush went wrong, other than having been asleep at the wheel during Katrina?

The GOP needs to confront the truth. The failure of the Bush presidency lies not in a failed execution of policy but in the policies themselves and the neoconservative ideology that informed them.

Yet still the party remains in denial, refusing to come to terms with the causes of its misfortune. They will now have the time and opportunity for reflection. “The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars but in ourselves.” ■