

Dangers of a Cornered George Bush

We reprint here, with its original title, a psychological assessment of the President by Dr. Justin Frank and the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). The Editor's Note below is by VIPS. Dr. Frank, a practicing psychoanalyst in Washington, is on the faculty of the George Washington University Medical School. He is the author of Bush on the Couch—Inside the Mind of the President (2004).

Editor's Note: As the nation and the world face 18 more months of George W. Bush's presidency, a chilling prospect is that Bush, confronted with more defeats and reversals, might just "lose it" and undertake even more reckless military adventures.

In this special memorandum, dated July 17, 2007, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) collaborated with psychiatrist Dr. Justin Frank, author of *Bush on the Couch*, to assess the potential dangers and possible countermeasures available to constrain Bush.

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Recent events have put a great deal more pressure on president George W. Bush, who has shown little regard for the constitutional system bequeathed to us by the Founders. Having bragged about being commander in chief of the "first war of the 21st century," one he began under false pretenses, success in Iraq is now a pipedream. The "new" strategy of surging troops in Baghdad has simply wasted more lives and bought some time for the president. His strategy boils down to keeping as many of our soldiers engaged as possible, in order to stave off definitive defeat in Iraq before January 2009.

Bush is commander in chief, but Congress must approve funding for the war, and its patience is running out. The war—and the polls—are going so badly that it is no longer a sure thing that the administration will be able to fund continuance of the war. There is an outside chance Congress will succeed in forcing a pullout starting in the next several months. What would the president likely do in reaction to that slap in the face? What would he do if the Resistance succeeded in mounting a large attack on U.S. facilities in the Green Zone or elsewhere in Iraq? How would he react if Israel mounted a preemptive attack on the nuclear-related facilities in Iran and wider war ensued?

Applied Psychoanalysis

The answers to such questions depend on a host of factors for which intelligence analysts use a variety of tools. One such tool involves applying the principles of psychoanalysis

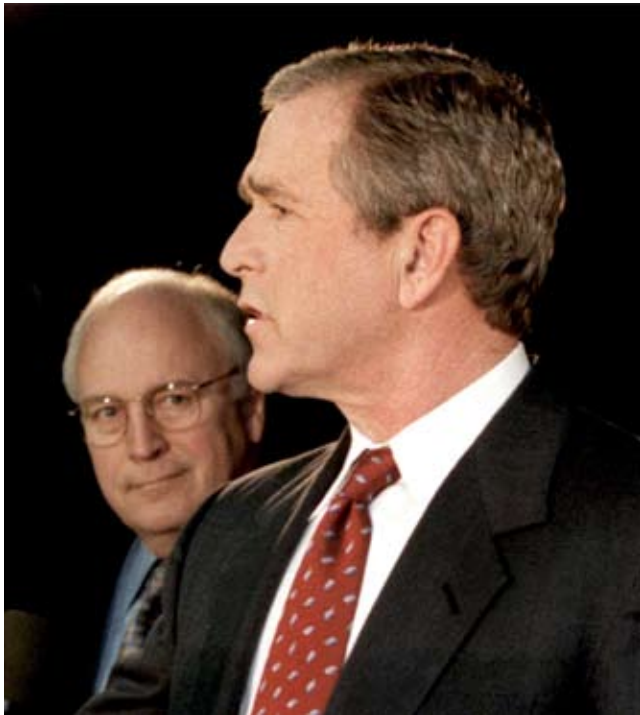
to acquire insights into the minds of key leaders, with an eye to facilitating predictions as to how they might react in certain circumstances. For U.S. intelligence, this common-law marriage of psychoanalysis and intelligence work dates back to the early 1940s, when the CIA's forerunner, the Office of Strategic Services, commissioned two studies of Adolf Hitler. We call such assessments "at-a-distance leader personality assessments." Many were quite useful.

VIPS found the 2004 book *Bush on the Couch*, by Washington psychiatrist Justin Frank, MD, a very helpful assessment in this genre. We now have two more years of experience of observing Bush closely. As we watched the pressure build on President Bush, looked toward the additional challenges we expect him to face over the next 18 months, and pondered his tendency to disregard the law and the Constitution, we felt very much in need of professional help in trying to estimate what kinds of decisions he is likely to make.

Dr. Frank, it turned out, had been thinking along the same lines, when we asked to meet with him just three weeks ago. What follows is a collaborative Frank-VIPS effort, with the psychological insights volunteered by Dr. Frank, who shares the imperative we feel to draw on all disciplines to assess what courses of action president George W. Bush is likely to decide upon in reacting to reverse after reverse in the coming months.

Parental discretion advised. The outlook is not only somber but potentially violent—and includes all manner of threats born of George W. Bush's mental state (as well as the unusual relationship he has with his vice president). Things are going to hell in a hand basket for this administration, and Bush/Cheney have shown a willingness to act in extra-Constitutional ways, as they see fit. While Bush and his advisers make a fetish of it, he is nonetheless commander in chief of the armed forces, and the question becomes how he might feel justified in using them, and is there still any restraining force—any checks on the increasing power of the executive in our three-branch government.

We have a president whose psychological makeup inclines him to do as he pleases. Because Congress has been cowed, and the judiciary stacked with loyalists, he has gotten away with it—so far. But the polls show growing discontent among the people, especially over the war in Iraq. Congress, too, is starting to challenge the executive, as it should—but slowly, slower than it should. The way things are moving, there is infinite opportunity to diddle and dodge—in effect conducting business pretty much as usual over the next 18 months.



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If the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney is underway when Bush orders our military to begin a war against Iran, the authors write, “there is a good chance that, rather than salute like automatons and start World War III, our senior military would find a way to prevent more carnage until such time as the representatives of the people in the House have spoken.”

Could Start Another War ...

Meanwhile, the president may well feel free to start another war, with little reference to the Congress or the UN, against Iran. The commander of CENTO forces, Admiral William Fallon, is quoted as having said we “will not go to war with Iran on my watch.” Tough words; but should the president order an attack on Iran, chances are Fallon and others will do what they are accustomed to doing, salute smartly and carry out orders, UNLESS they show more regard for the U.S. Constitution than the president does. There is an orderly remedy written into the Constitution aimed at preventing a president from usurping the power of the people and acting like a king; the process, of course, is impeachment.

The usual focus on impeachment is on abuses of the past, and a compelling case can surely be made. We believe an equally compelling incentive can be seen in looking toward the next 18 months. In this paper, we are primarily concerned about what future misadventures are likely if this administration is not somehow held to account; that is, if Bush and Cheney are not removed from office.

Unless Checked

If the constitutional process of impeachment is under way when President Bush orders our military to begin a war against

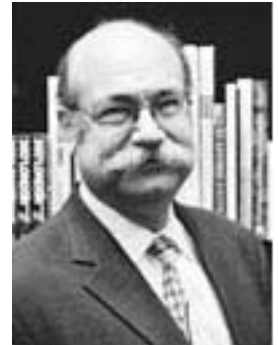
Iran, there is a good chance that, rather than salute like automatons and start World War III, our senior military would find a way to prevent more carnage until such time as the representatives of the people in the House have spoken. This administration’s capacity for mischief would not end until conviction in the Senate. But initiating the impeachment process appears to be the only way to launch a shot across the bow of this particular ship of state. For it is captained by a president with a psychological makeup likely to lead to new misadventures likely to end in a ship wreck unless the Constitution is brought alongside and a new pilot boarded.

We are grateful that Dr. Frank agreed to collaborate with us and to issue under VIPS auspices the psychological assessment that follows.

Discussion of the three scenarios after his profiling of President Bush was very much a collaborative exercise aimed at applying Frank’s insights to contingencies our president may have to address before he leaves office. Our conclusions are, of necessity, speculative—and, sorry, scary.

The Assessment of Dr. Frank

If a patient came into my consulting room missing an arm, the first question I would ask is, “What happened to your arm?” The same would be true for a patient who has no guilt, no conscience. I would want to know what happened to it.



Dr. Justin Frank

No Conscience

George W. Bush is without conscience, and it would require a lengthy series of clinical sessions to find out what happened to it. By identifying himself as all good and on the side of right, he has been able to vanquish any guilt, any sense of doing wrong.

In *Bush on the Couch*, I gave examples illustrating that remarkable lack of conscience. From his youthful days blowing up frogs with firecrackers to his unapologetic public endorsement of torture, there has been no change. Observers are gradually becoming aware of this fundamental deficit. For example, after watching the president’s press conference on July 12, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan wrote, “He doesn’t seem to be suffering, which is jarring. Presidents in great enterprises that are going badly suffer: Lincoln, LBJ with his head in his hands. Why doesn’t Mr. Bush?”

No Shame

George W. Bush seems also to be without shame. He expresses no regret or embarrassment about his failure to help Katrina victims, or to tell the truth. He says whatever he thinks

people want to hear, whether it be “stay the course” or “I’ve never been about ‘stay the course.’” He does whatever he wants.

He lies—not just to us, but to himself as well. What makes lying so easy for Bush is his contempt—for language, for law, and for anybody who dares question him. That he could say so baldly that he’d never been about “stay the course” is bone chilling. So his words mean nothing. That is very important for people to understand.

Fear of Humiliation

Despite having no shame, Bush has a profound fear of failure and humiliation. He defends himself from this by any means at his disposal—most frequently with indifference or contempt. He will flinch only if directly confronted about being a failure or a liar. Otherwise world events are enough removed from him that he can spin them into his intact defense system.

This deep fear helps to explain his relentlessly escalating attacks on others, his bullying, and his use of nicknames to put people down. There is fear of being found out not to be as big in every way as his father. What a burden to have to face his many inadequacies—now held up to the light of day—whether it is his difficulty in speaking, thinking, reading, managing anxiety, or making good decisions. He will not change, because for him change means humiliating collapse. He is very fearful of public exposure of his many inadequacies.

Contempt for Truth?

Contempt itself is a defense, a form of self-protection, which helps Bush appear at ease and relaxed—at least to big fans like *New York Times* columnist David Brooks. The president’s contempt defense protects his belief system, a system he clings to as if his beliefs were well-researched facts. His pathology is a patchwork of false beliefs and incomplete information woven into what he asserts is the whole truth. What gets lost in this process is growth—the George W. Bush of 2007 is exactly the same as the one of 2001. Helen Thomas has said that of all the presidents she has covered over the years, Bush is the least changed by his job, by his experience. This is why there is no possibility of dialogue or reasoning with him.

Sadistic

His certitude that he is right gives him carte blanche for destructive behavior. He has always had a sadistic streak: from blowing up frogs, to shooting his siblings with a b-b-gun, to branding fraternity pledges with white-hot coat hangers. His comfort with cruelty is one reason he can be so jocular with reporters when talking about American casualties in Iraq. Instead of seeing a president in anguish, we watch him publicly joking about the absence of “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, in the vain search for which so many young Americans died.

Break It!

Bush likes to break things, needs to break things. And this is most shockingly seen in how he is systematically destroying our armed forces. In the early days of the Iraq invasion he refused to approve the large number of troops the generals said were needed in order to try to invade and pacify Iraq, and acquiesced in the firing of any general who disagreed. He turned a blind eye to giving troops proper equipment, and cut funding for needed health care. Health care and other social programs have one thing in common: they are paid for by public funds. It may well be that, unconsciously, the government represents his neglectful parents, and those helped by the government represent the siblings he resents. If George W. Bush wanted to destroy his own family, he could scarcely have done better. Thanks to him, no Bush is likely to be elected to high office for generations to come.

Where Does This Leave Us?

It leaves us with a regressed president who needs to protect himself more than ever from diminishment, humiliation, and collapse. He is so busy trying to manage his own anxiety that he has little capacity left to attend to national and world problems. And so, we are left with a president who cannot actually govern, because he is incapable of reasoned thought in coping with events outside his control, like those in the Middle East. This makes it a monumental challenge—as urgent as it is difficult—not only to get him to stop the carnage in the Middle East, but also to prevent him from undertaking a new, perhaps even more disastrous adventure—like going to war with Iran, in order to embellish the image he so proudly created for himself after 9/11 as the commander in chief of “the first war of the 21st century.” Iran would make number three—all the compelling reasons against it notwithstanding.

Contingencies

We will now attempt to put flesh on the discussion by positing and examining scenarios that would force Bush to react, and applying the observations above and other data to forecast what form that reaction might take.

Outlined below are three illustrative contingencies, each of which would pose a neuralgic threat to George W. Bush’s shaky self-esteem, his over-determined efforts to stave off humiliation, and his unending need for self-protection. These are not seat-of-the-pants scenarios. Each of them is possible—arguably, even probable. The importance of coming up with educated guesses regarding Bush’s response BEFORE they occur is, we hope, clear.

Scenario A: Destructive Attack on the Green Zone

The U.S. military is out in front of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and other policymakers in Washington in seeing the



U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Ashley Brokop

U.S. forces and Iraq police respond to a bombing by an improvised explosive device outside the gate of the super-protected Green Zone. If there were a major attack on the Green Zone today, Bush might “let the bombs and missiles fall where they may.”

hand of Iran’s government behind “the enemy” in Iraq. On July 26, the operational commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, blamed the recent “significant improvement” in the accuracy of mortar and rocket attacks on the Green Zone on “training conducted inside Iran.” Odierno also repeated that roadside bombs are being smuggled into Iraq from Iran. Last week, Gen. David Petraeus warned that insurgents intend to “pull off a variety of sensational attacks and grab the headlines to create a ‘mini-Tet.’” (Tet refers to the surprise country-wide offensive mounted by the Vietnamese Communists in early 1968, which indicated to most Americans that the war was lost.)

Attacks on the Green Zone have doubled in recent months. Despite this, the senior military appear to be in denial with respect to the vulnerability of the Green Zone—oblivious even to the reality that mortar rounds and rocket fire have little respect for walled enclaves. Anyone with a mortar and access to maps and images on Google can calibrate fire to devastating effect—with or without training in Iran. It is just a matter of time before a mortar round or rocket takes out part of the spanking new \$600-million U.S. embassy together with people working there or nearby. And/or, the insurgents could conceivably mount a multi-point assault on the zone and gain control of a couple of buildings and take hostages—perhaps including senior diplomats and military officers.

Given what we think we know of George Bush, if there were an embarrassing attack on U.S. installations in the Green Zone or some other major U.S. facility, he would immediately order a retaliatory series of air strikes, and let the bombs and missiles fall where they may. The reaction would come from deep within and would warn, in effect: This is what you get if you try to make me look bad.

Scenario B: Israeli Attack on Nuclear Targets in Iran

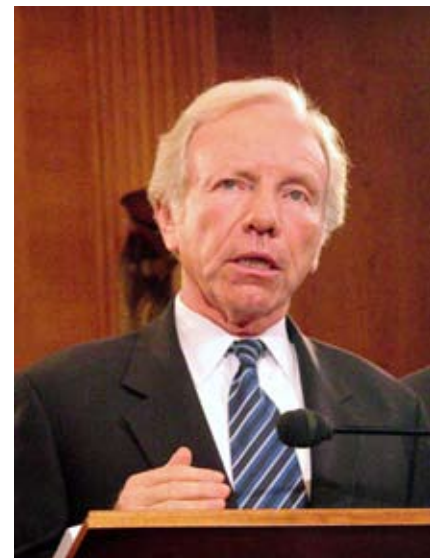
This would be madness and would elicit counterattacks from an Iran with many viable options for significant retaliation. Nevertheless, Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), and his namesake Avigdor Lieberman, Israel’s minister of strategic affairs, are openly calling for such strikes, which would have to be on much more massive a scale than Israel’s bombing of

Iraq’s nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981.

For that attack in 1981, Cheney, a great fan of preemptive strikes, congratulated the Israelis, even though the U.S. joined other UN Security Council members in unanimously condemning the Israeli attack. Five years ago, on Aug. 26, 2002, Cheney became the first U.S. official publicly to refer approvingly to the bombing of Osirak. And in an interview two and a half years ago, on Inauguration Day 2005, Cheney referred nonchalantly to the possibility that “the Israelis might well



U.S. State Department/Michael Gross



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

The two maniacal Liebermans, Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Lieberman (left) and U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), are calling for Israeli strikes against Iran. The U.S. military opposes such an attack, but Cheney supports it, and has often overruled the military.

decide to act first [to eliminate Iran's nuclear capabilities] and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the diplomatic mess afterwards."

One thing Cheney says is indisputably—if myopically—true: Bush has been Israel's best friend. In his speeches, he has fostered the false impression that the U.S. is treaty-bound to defend Israel, should it come under attack—as would be likely, were Israel to attack Iran. With the U.S. Congress firmly in the Israeli camp, Cheney might see little disincentive to giving a green-light wink to Israel and then let the president "worry about cleaning up."

Reporting from Seymour Hersh's administration sources serves to strengthen the impression shining through Bush's speeches that he is eager to strike Iran. But how to justify it? Curiously, a National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear capability, a study scheduled for completion early this year, has been sent back several times—probably because its predictions are not as alarmist as the warnings that Cheney and the Israelis are whispering into the president's ear. Senior U.S. military officers have warned against the folly of attacking Iran, but Cheney has shown himself, time and time again, able to overrule the military.

But What If Impeachment Begins?

Is there nothing to rein in Bush and Cheney? It seems likely that only if impeachment proceedings were under way would senior officers like CENTCOM commander, Admiral William Fallon, be likely to parry an unlawful order to start yet another war without the approval of Congress and the UN. With impeachment under way, such senior officers might be reminded that all officers and national security officials swear an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States—NOT to protect and defend the president.

It was a highly revealing moment when on July 11, former White House political director Sara Taylor solemnly reminded the Senate Judiciary Committee, that as a commissioned officer, "I took an oath and I take that oath to the president very seriously." Committee chair Patrick Leahy had to remind Taylor: "We understand your personal loyalty to president Bush. I appreciate you correcting that your oath was not to the president, but to the Constitution."

The most senior officers, military included, can get their loyalties mixed up. And this is of transcendent importance in a context described by Seymour Hersh: "These guys are scary as hell . . . you can't use the word 'delusional,' for it's actually a medical term. Wacky. That's a fair word."

One does not need psychoanalytic training to see that Bush and Cheney do not care about facts, treaties (or the lack thereof), or other legal niceties, unless it suits their purpose. This gives an even more ominous ring to what Hersh is hearing from his sources. If Israel attacks Iran, President Bush is likely to spring to Israel's defense, regardless of whether he was inside or outside the loop before the attack; and the world will see a dangerously widened war in the Middle East. Psy-



U.S. Navy/Spc. 2nd class Gabriela Hurtado

Adm. William Fallon, Commander, U.S. Central Command, says we "will not go to war with Iran on my watch"—but it seems likely that only if impeachment proceedings were under way, would he and other senior officers be reminded that their oath is to the Constitution—not to the President.

chologically, Bush would almost certainly need to join the attack, mainly to sustain his illusion of safety and masculinity. And Cheney, knowing that, would be pushing him hard on U.S. energy and other perceived strategic interests.

Scenario C: Congress Cuts War Funding This Fall

Let's assume that Congress finally grows weary of the increasingly obvious bait-and-switch, the "we-need-more-time" tactic, and cuts off all funding except for that needed to bring the troops home. The talk now is about getting a "meaningful" progress report in November, because September is said to be too soon. The Iraqi parliament is behaving much like its American counterpart by taking August off. But our soldiers do not get a month-long hiatus from constant danger.

It is clear even to the press that the surge has simply brought more American deaths and an upsurge of insurgent attacks. What is less clear is why Bush remains so positive. It is probably not just an act, but an *idée fixe* he needs to hold onto tightly. Since doubt is dangerous, we see a compensatory smile fixed on the face of the president and other senior officials, dismissing any trace of uncertainty or doubt.

If Congress cut off funding for war in Iraq, Bush might well cast about for a *casus belli* to "justify" an attack on Iran. Would the senior military again go along with orders for an unprovoked, unconstitutional war on a country posing no threat to the U.S.? Hard to say. In this context, an ongoing impeachment process could provide welcome evidence that influential members of Congress, like many senior military officers, see through Bush's need to strike out elsewhere. Military commanders might think twice before saluting smartly and executing an illegal order.

In such circumstances, Dick “it-won’t stop-us” Cheney, could be expected to try to pull out all the stops. But if he, too, were in danger of being impeached, uniformed military officers could conceivably block administration plans. There is only a remote chance that Defense Secretary Gates would be a tempering voice in all this. Far more likely, he would smell in any restrictive legislation traces of the Boland amendment, which he assisted in circumventing during the Iran-Contra misadventure.

Petraeus ex Machina

With “David” or “General Petraeus” punctuating the president’s every other sentence at recent press conferences, the script for September seems clear. This is one four-star general with exquisite PR and political acumen—pedigree and discipline the president can count on. And with his nine rows of ribbons, he calls to mind the U.S. commander in Saigon, Gen. William Westmoreland at a similar juncture in Vietnam (after the Tet offensive, when popular support dropped off rapidly). It is virtually certain that Petraeus will press hard for more time and more troops. Potemkin-style improvements will be used by Bush to justify continuing the “new” surge strategy, with the calculation that enough Democrats might be overcome by the fear of being charged with “losing Iraq.”

In the past Bush seems to have bought Cheney’s “analysis” that increased enemy attacks were signs of desperation. Hard as it is to believe that Bush has not learned from that repeated experience, it is at the same time possible to “misunderestimate” one’s capacity for wooden-headedness, particularly with respect to someone with the psychological makeup of our president. He is extraordinarily adept at finding only rose-colored glasses to help him see.

With Cheney egging him on from the wings of the “unitary executive,” but Congress no longer bowing to that novel interpretation of the Constitution, Bush will be sorely tempted to lash out in some violent way, if further funding for the war is denied. To do that effectively, he will need senior generals and admirals as co-conspirators. It will be up to them to choose between career and Constitution. All too often, in such circumstances, the tendency has been to choose career. Impeachment hearings, though, could encourage senior officers like Admiral Fallon to pause long enough to remember that their oath is to defend the Constitution, and that they are not required to follow orders to start another war in order to stave off political and personal disaster for the president and vice president.

Justin Frank, M.D.

With,

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