

AUGUST 29

# Triangulation for war

**A**spectrum of liberal responses to Cindy Sheehan has come into sharper focus. The message is often anti-Bush... but not necessarily anti-war. Frank Rich spun out his particular style of triangulation in the New York Times on Aug. 28. While deriding President Bush's stay-the-course stance, Rich also felt a need to disparage the most visible advocate for quick withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Putting down Sheehan – and, by implication, the one-third of the U.S. public that wants all American troops to exit Iraq without delay – Rich's column mocked "her bumper-sticker politics" and "the slick left-wing political operatives who have turned her into a circus."

Rich criticized "the utter bankruptcy of the Democrats who had rubber-stamped this misadventure in the first place." Yet, in effect, he was willing to help rubber-stamp continuation of the "misadventure" in the present tense.

The president, Rich lamented, "pretends that the only alternative to his reckless conduct of the war is Ms. Sheehan's equally apocalyptic retreat."

Equating what George W. Bush is doing with what Cindy Sheehan is advocating? Is there really an option for non-reckless "conduct of the war" that would be better than ending the U.S. war effort in Iraq?

Rich praised Sen. Russell Feingold's "timetable theme" – along the lines of getting U.S. troops out of Iraq by the end of next year. That would be a "target date," Rich explained approvingly, "as opposed to a deadline."

But no realistic explanation is available as to what conditions will exist in December 2006 that won't exist in December 2005 in Iraq. Are we supposed to believe that all the Americans who die next year -- and all the Iraqis they kill and all the Iraqis who die at the hands of other Iraqis incensed by the U.S. occupation -- should be ultimately sacrificed so that pundits, politicians and their reliable sources can wait a decent interval before (in Rich's words) "our inexorable exit from Iraq"?

For that matter, we should question just how "inexorable" a U.S. exit from Iraq is.

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After all, it's hardly certain that the worst and dumbest or the best and brightest in Washington will opt for evacuation of the U.S. military bases in Iraq. And can we really assume that the president will order complete withdrawal from a country with so many billions of barrels of oil under the sand?

While many anti-GOP pundits insist that a fast withdrawal is no way to go, numerous leaders of the Democratic Party are even more eager to triangulate. "Senior Democrats sought to distance themselves Sunday from Sheehan's protest," the Washington Post reported on Aug. 29, a day after Sen. Byron Dorgan appeared on a Fox network show and said: "If we withdrew tomorrow, there would be a bloodbath in Iraq. We can't do that." Yet a bloodbath is already well underway in Iraq and shows no sign of abating under the U.S. occupation.

Meanwhile, a more overt pro-war position is explicit from the Washington Post, which seems bent on replicating its blood-soaked history of editorial support for the Vietnam War.

In August 1966 the Post's owner, Katharine Graham, discussed the war with a writer in line to take charge of the newspaper's editorial page. "We agreed that the Post ought to work its way out of the very supportive editorial position it had taken, but that we couldn't be precipitate; we had to move away gradually from where we had been," Graham was to write in her autobiography. Many more deaths resulted from such unwillingness to "be precipitate."

In August 2005, while noting the latest setbacks for the U.S. agenda in Iraq, the Post's editorial on the last Saturday of the month did not waver – and was certainly not precipitate: "There is no cause for despair, or for abandoning the basic U.S. strategy in Iraq, which is to support the election of a permanent national government and train security forces capable of defending it with continuing help from American troops. But it is dispiriting, and damaging to the chances for success, that President Bush still refuses to speak honestly to the country about the challenges the United States now faces, or how he intends to address them."

This is an inventive proclivity of the Washington Post and many other corporate media outlets that are eager to advise the president on how to build a better war trap.

Meanwhile, by any measure in this country, the summer has brought a grassroots upsurge of insistence that the Iraq war is not suitable for tinkering or for a long good-bye. On Aug. 29, two days after the Post published its editorial claiming that "there is no cause for despair," a news article in the paper quoted one of the activists who has been working for years against this war. Nancy Lessin, a co-founder of Military Families Speak Out, is working on preparations for bus tours that will soon depart from

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Crawford and travel various routes to Washington, with activists aboard from MFSO, Gold Star Families for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Veterans for Peace.

"The questions that Cindy Sheehan has for George Bush are now questions for members of Congress and decision-makers across the country," Lessin said. "We are not here to make deals with the lives of our children. We will be calling on all decision-makers to bring the troops home now."

Commentators who dismiss such a plea as "bumper-sticker politics" have failed to truly grasp the significance of the Vietnam War and its somber memorials, including the one in Washington. Those pundits do not comprehend the writing on the wall.

Norman Solomon is the author of the new book

"War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death."

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