



ERIC MARGOLIS

A letter to the president

Dear George Bush: Even though you appear to have made up your mind to go to war with Iraq, may I respectfully suggest you consider a few points before risking the lives of tens of thousands of Americans—not to mention your British, Canadian and Arab allies.

First, I don't trust your judgment. After all, you are the man who picked Dan Quayle as vice president of the United States. If anything were to happen to you, Quayle—who I wouldn't nominate for secretary of a local service club—will become president. Anyone who thought Quayle would be a good vice president should not be entrusted with the decision to go to war with Iraq.

And have a look at your advisers who back a war. Quayle, who dodged the draft during the Vietnam war. Secretary of defence Dick Cheney, who never served in the armed forces. The suave Texas lawyer, Jim Baker, who never carried a rifle. Or your two in-house military men, national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, a nuclear weapons strategist, and Gen. Colin Powell, another political general in the mould of the dimwitted Al Haig, who was leaptfrogged to the top because of his black skin rather than his command

abilities. Neither knows anything about the Mideast.

Why don't you listen to the long parade of former fighting admirals and generals, as well as crisis-hardened statesmen like the brilliant Zbigniew Brzezinski, who are urging you to avoid war?

Take a hard look at the motives of those who are urging you to go to war.

➤ The fat, sickeningly rich Arab oil sheiks who are trembling on their gilded thrones as they hear the angry voices of the Arab people. They want you to use American soldiers to save their skins.

➤ The pro-Israel lobby, which wants American GIs to fight Iraq so Israeli soldiers won't have to.

➤ The arms industry which sees a war with Iraq as the last chance to save itself from budget cuts.

➤ And all the red-necked yahoos in the U.S. who have been aching to "get even with them A-rabs."

It's folly to go to war without knowing what kind of peace you want to emerge after the fighting ends. So far, you have not shown any awareness of this fact.

Yes, your forces can take Kuwait, but what then? Are you ready to fight a medium-intensity guerrilla and conventional war with Iraq for the foreseeable future?

If not, you must then march on Baghdad. I hear in senior republican circles that your real objective is to "get Saddam." But you don't have enough men to occupy and hold Iraq—just as the U.S. didn't have enough combat troops in Vietnam.

I hope you're ready, Mr. President, to get bogged down in a bloody mess in the Mideast. I hope you're ready to see U.S. citizens and property attacked from Morocco to Iran. I hope you have a contingency plan if part of the Gulf oil installations are destroyed by Iraq—or made inoperable by chemical attacks.

Are you really ready to deal with a massive worldwide oil crisis, followed by the possible collapse of the U.S. banking system and the stock markets? All this when the U.S. Treasury is bankrupt and kept afloat only by Japanese loans—and after you made a complete hash of so-called budget reduction talks.

Mr. Bush, they're saying in the top ranks of your own party that you are an increasingly confused, inept and feckless leader. When I hear your own supporters saying such things, I tremble that you are also the man who is going to lead us into an unpredictable war with Iraq.

A war in the Mideast will not solve your domestic problems. Bombing Baghdad

won't make the savings and loan disaster or the out-of-control deficit, or the trade crisis go away.

President Bush, the U.S. has given billions and billions in military aid to Israel. The U.S. has sold or given billions more in arms to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Let these Mideastern nations solve the problems of their region. Let the Europeans and Japanese, who import most Mideastern oil, figure out how to deal with the sinister, ruthless Saddam Hussein. Why should boys from Harlem and Waco lay down their lives in a war for oil that future historians may regard as cynical and ignoble as the Opium Wars of the 19th century?

And I don't care if, as you say, you've "had enough," or that your patience is through or that you're really mad. You are leader of a republic, not a North American version of Saddam. You must have patience, diplomacy and more patience.

Kuwait and its oil sheiks are not worth the blood of one single American. If you really think they are, then send your son and Dan Quayle out there to lead the first bayonet charge. Military service may make real men out of them.