

# The Sphere

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## Part I: Written Before March 17:

George W. Bush is out of control.

The reason I say this is, a man named Andrew J. O'Conner, a lawyer and former public defender in Santa Fe, NM, said it in an Internet chat room on Feb. 13, and was promptly arrested for "threatening the president".

They brutally interrogated him for five hours, which failed (not surprisingly) to establish that anything he said actually constituted a threat, before grudgingly letting him go.

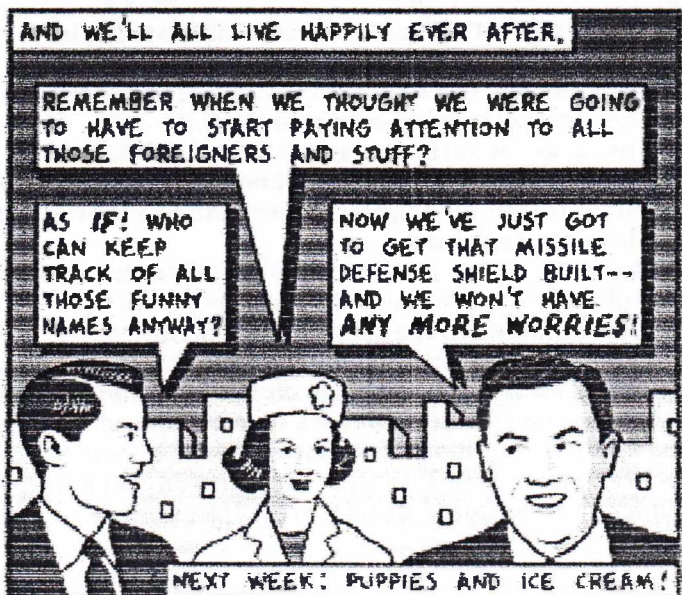
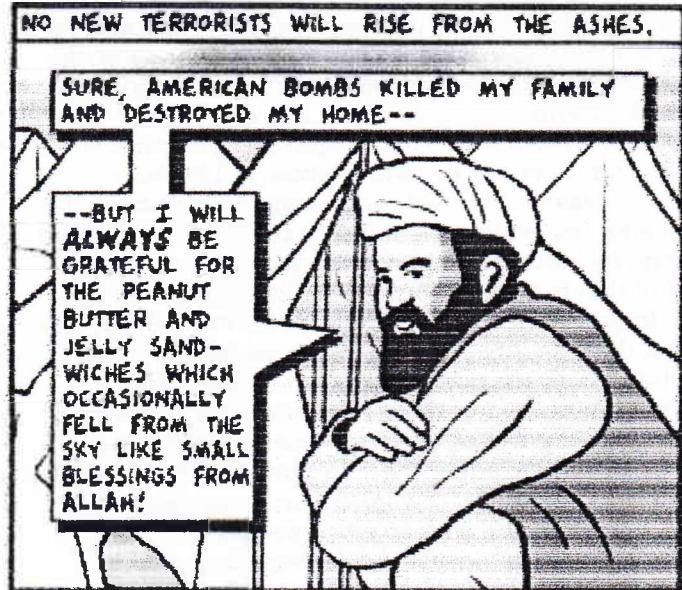
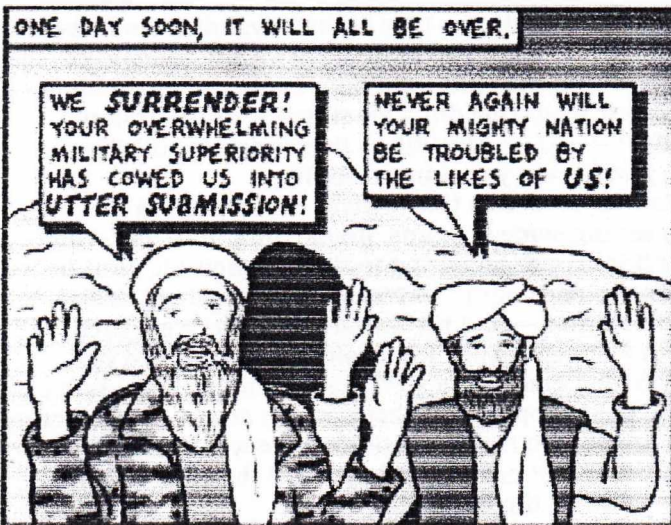
But of course, his punishment for exercising his God-given right of free speech was the five hours of interrogation itself. I'll bet he thinks twice next time he feel like exercising any so-called Constitutional rights in George W. Bush's America.

So, let me say it once again. Bush is out of control.

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

### THIS WEEK: PATRIOTIC OPTIMISM!



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Now — arrest me. I'll gladly take my five hours of interrogation, or any damn thing else they want to do to me because that will simply constitute **more** proof that Bush is out of control. Even if they use it as an excuse to shoot me dead (which they recently threatened to do to Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, former member of British Parliament who is known for her views on British activities in Ireland, just because they knew, and flaunted the fact, that they could get away with it), that won't change the truth, that George W. Bush is out of control.

Of course, another reason for saying it is the simple fact that Bush **really** is out of control. In his colossal arrogance, he doesn't see a need to exercise even the most basic control over himself.

He calls entire countries "cowards" for refusing to endorse his proposed unprovoked attack on Iraq. In reality, of course, a **coward** would be someone without the moral fortitude to stand up to his intense bullying. If he were in control, the fact that this is so obvious would lead him to at least curb his tongue.

He tells bald-faced lies about economic studies proving tax cuts that apply only to the extremely wealthy will be good for the economy (which has never been the case in the past, but that never stopped the likes of him from pushing them). If he were in control, the certainty of the people making the studies pointing out the truth would surely deter him.

More bald-faced lies — and stupid, childish ones at that, the kind nobody in control would tell because they're too easy to find out. According to his State of the Union address, evidence that Iraq is continuing a nuclear program includes a uranium deal with Niger, and the proof of that is a set of documents that turn out to be crude forgeries. Gee, I wonder who could've forged them! Oh, but there's more evidence, such as a bunch of aluminum tubes it's been buying up, that are useful for processing uranium — but those particular tubes are **not** useful for that purpose, as atomic energy specialists all over the world, including those employed by the U.S. government, know. Gee, I wonder how Bush could've gotten it wrong? And with so much so-called "evidence" turning out to be phoney, I wonder why the world doesn't find his unsupported word credible?

And if you want the **real** proof he's out of control — good grief, he's about to launch a **preemptive strike**, in the face of the entire world's opposition, against a country that can't be demonstrated to have any weapons of mass destruction it didn't buy from the U.S.!

The Greeks, as the saying goes, had a word for it. In this case, the word is "hubris". We all know what hubris is a precursor to, but the tragedy, unfortunately, is more likely to befall us than him.

It isn't so long since a prominent SFPAn called the majority of Americans "morons" because they didn't get as rabid as she did when the president lied about his sexual activity (while remaining mum on real causes to revile Clinton, such as his refusal to outlaw land mines).

Here, we have a president who lies **constantly** and **transparently** about things that **matter**, and is about to use his lies to mire us in a war that can't possibly do any good in terms of economic benefit to the U.S., safety

from terrorism, freedom of expression, or anything else but his own macho self-satisfaction (unless it's his oil interests) — and without a word of reproach from the people who carried on endlessly and at great volume about the intolerable crisis imposed upon the nation by Clinton's continued existence.

So, who's the moron?

And who's out of control?

## News from Elsewhere

Being aware of the extreme and obvious bias of the U.S. news media (and it ain't toward "liberal"), I get a lot of my news from overseas sources. If you don't, you're getting only a very limited view of what's going on in the world, and certainly far from a balanced one. Thank God for the Web, where we don't have to get our information filtered through the large corporations (and a corporation, as we know, is merely a government-chartered collective) that make such a mighty effort to manage what we're permitted to see and hear.

A share-worthy item appeared in Britain's *Sunday Mirror* on March 9. It's possible the U.S. media picked up on it, but if so, I missed it. I'd point you directly at the *Mirror* report, but it has one of those alphabet-soup URLs that nobody can type accurately. I did, tho, provide a clickable link for you at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html> (just like I did once before, when *Editor & Publisher* magazine did a great review of the Toonopedia™ — in fact, the link to that review is still there too, just in case you want to see it).

Anyway, it seems this British military unit in Kuwait was testing some big guns, preparatory to — well, whatever it is they're preparing to do with their big guns in that area; personally I'm trying reach a state of denial about all that — and the minute the shots were fired, about a dozen rag-tag Iraqi soldiers, who looked like they hadn't eaten for a week, came running up, waving white flags. Apparently, they'd snuck across the border and up close to the base, so when the war started, which they thought it had when they heard the guns go off, they could be the first to surrender.

The commander told them they'd jumped the gun, so to speak, and would have to go back into hiding and wait for the proper time.

To my way of thinking, it would have been an act of kindness to just accept the damn surrender. I hope they at least fed the poor guys before turning them away.

This is country George W. Bush (who is out of control) wants us to wage war on, out of fear for its capacity to inflict damage on the world. I'd laugh, but it isn't funny.

## Spam

Like most of us, I delete the majority of my e-mails unread. They vary in subject matter, of course, and oddly enough, the subjects seem to come in waves. For example, I've suddenly been inundated by a veritable avalanche of Nigerian spam (identifiable by the words "important", "confidential" or "business proposal" in the heading and an origin with someone whose name

sounds like it might be African), after getting none at all for months; and for a couple of weeks I was getting stuff with the exact heading "Eat Pizza, Watch TV, Lose Weight", four or five times a day.

I recently deleted one with the header "Re: Your Pencil-Size Dick". I found that amusing — it implied I'd already had correspondence on the subject with the sender (who affected a female name, like so many of its genre), and, had actually replied to one with that title. (The inside might have been amusing too, but I'll never know.)

Some people go apeshit on the subject of spam, tirading at great length about what a terrible, terrible intrusion it is on their lives, but geez, isn't the "Delete" key handy enough? (Phone solicitors, now — they interrupt me at my work, which often requires intense concentration, so **them**, I regard as a menace.)

Right here in SFPA, we have people who have instructed their ISPs not to show them mail from entire domains, and very popular ones at that (such as Hotmail), because spammers have been known to use those domains. And of course they're only hurting themselves, because decent people use Hotmail too, and it may be that some of those decent people might send them mail they'd rather get than not. None o'my beeswax, but I do note the single SFPAn whom I know to block anything coming from Hotmail is not one whom I regard as particularly intelligent.

There's at least one entire ISP, rr.com, that seems to have run amuck on blocking spam — to the point where I can't reply to anyone using it who writes to me at the Toonopedia™ address, because toonopedia.com appears to be among the domains they don't want mail from. Whenever something of mine bounces back from them, I send the correspondent the following from my cox.net address, with a copy to the ISP.

This is a courtesy note, to let you know your ISP is preventing you from receiving legitimate e-mail. I am sending it from my business account rather than the Toonopedia™ address, where you wrote me at [TIME], because your server bounced my reply. It claims I'm a spammer (which I am not), and gives "error code" ERROR:5.7.1:550.

This has happened to me before, **always** from rr.com, which appears to have run amuck on the issue of security. Arrogantly enough, your service provider suggested steps I should take to fix the problem.

But I do not have a problem. **You** do. Your problem is that your service provider is keeping you from communicating with people like me. I will not jump through their hoops to reply to your mail, because I am not the one harmed by their refusal to let you see my reply.

How many times have you written to strangers, and thought them rude for not replying? It could be they tried to reply, but were prevented from doing so by your own service provider. How many other innocent domains do you suppose rr.com keeps you from communicating with?

Do you really need to be serviced like this? I use the term in the sense that a bull "services" a cow.

I will make one more attempt to reply to your query, 24 hours from now. I suggest you use the time to try to get your problem fixed.

I won't attempt to tell you what to do if rr.com refuses to

fix the problem. If I were in your position I'd move to a different ISP, but I'm not the one whose mail is being tampered with.

Meanwhile, at the aforementioned Toonopedia™ address, I continue to receive great volumes of mail about how to improve my standing in search engines, or from people selling software or services to submit my site to hundreds or thousands of the things on a regular basis. Since the search engine folks consider automated or frequently repeated submissions spam (and, I hear, penalize sites that do them), I guess pitches like that are meta-spam. I delete that stuff just like all the rest, but I smile as I do so. I'm doing just fine in most search engines, and the search engine, Google, does quite well by me despite the fact that I only submitted my site to it once, just before opening. Probably a majority of my articles are on the first page of a Google search for their subjects, and dozens are #1. I can usually count on any new article appearing on Google in about 2-5 days, usually with good placement. And I don't have to lift a finger, much less pay someone to get me in. Speaking of which —

## Don Markstein's Toonopedia™

For some reason, traffic is on the rise lately. What I originally thought was **phenomenal** traffic, 15,000 page views the day Yahoo made me a Pick of the Day, has become commonplace — in fact, that total was exceeded once in December, once in January and **seven** times in February. Average traffic was 10,157 in December, 11,499 in January and 13,673 in February. I expect a little leveling off in March, because for reasons I haven't figured out, February had several really huge days (the peak that month being 22,489), but even so, the first week of the month averaged 12,708.

Anyway, I think I'm safe in saying five-digit daily traffic is now the norm. And I've scarcely done anything to promote the site, and don't intend to until I've found a way to (as they say) "monetize" all that great traffic.

New articles since the last SFPA mailing are Alphonse & Gaston, Arak Son of Thunder, The Avenger, Barney Bear, Bat Lash, Beyond Mars, Brother Voodoo, Deputy Dawg, Foofur, The Get Along Gang, Goofy Gophers, Gyro Gearloose, Judge Dredd, Kissyfur, Little Annie Rooney, The Phantom Stranger, Power Girl, Rainbow Brite, Sgt. Rock, Super President, Supersnipe, Tillie the Toiler, The Wizard and Young Allies. New total is 596. Won't be long before I can replace "500+" articles on the Contents page with "600+". But the real milestone will come a few weeks afterward — there were 305 articles on Opening Day (Feb. 13, 2001), and pretty soon I'll have twice that.

Speaking of minor milestones, the 2nd anniversary just passed, the same day the 582nd article went up. This means 147 were posted during the second year, up from 130 in the first. Keep putting one up every few days, and in a couple more years, maybe I'll be able to say I'm sort of starting to have something resembling a handle on it.



Of these 24 new articles, Google lists no less than six in the top spot on a search for their subjects. Eleven more are at least on the first page. More than half — not bad, eh? Of course, Google listings are always subject to a certain amount of reshuffling (Brother Voodoo was #2 when it first went up and is now #1, and Supersnipe the opposite), but that's not too shabby.

Probably the biggest obscure in this batch is Super President, which was on Saturday morning for one season in the 1960s, and which I included mainly because the concept is so goofy. A few, such as Young Allies, Arak Son of Thunder and the like, are well known to comics fans but not to the general public, but that's okay because while comics fans aren't the audience I'm mostly shooting for, I do get a lot of traffic from that demographic and ought to do **some** stuff for them. Alphonse & Gaston are practically superstars — maybe nobody knows exactly who they are anymore (until they read my article, at least), but they're still referred to a lot.

The Avenger is obscure both to the general public and to comics fans. I included it for several reasons. First, it's general "texture" — stuff that sort of fills in between other articles to give a better rounded picture of the subject. He's a Cold War period piece, and represents quite a few very minor superheroes that came and went briefly during the 1950s. A lot of people who think they know comics history have no idea such things existed, or if they do, no idea there were so many. I made it a point to mention at least a half-dozen others, and the fact that there were more. But the main reason I wrote it was so I could use this really neat picture of him kicking a Commie that I happened to run across.

Brother Voodoo is fairly famous among comics fans, but in an odd sort of way — he's famous for being an obscure. I heard, tho, that the Sci-Fi Channel is going to do a movie on him, so I figured I ought to have an article on him in place before their publicity for it starts — and what the heck, there's not so much information about him in the entire world, that writing a comprehensive article on him was a whole lot of work. Another I added for a special reason was Gyro Gearloose. Someone GiGi knows through a message board is a particular fan of his, and complained (mildly) to her that I didn't have an article on him. I wrote it mostly so she could take credit for it on the board.

And several of them, like Foofur and Rainbow Brite, are a continuation of my efforts to get more 1970s and '80s TV animation listed. I've slacked off on that some, tho there are still a few that I ought to get to (such as My Little Pony and Jcm) reasonably soon. Right now, tho, I'm thinking I ought to have better coverage of relatively recent newspaper comics (i.e., those that started during the second half of the 20th century), and am putting some effort into gathering pictures of characters like Tank McNamara, Moose & Molly, Eek & Meek and the like. (One problem is that, except for those currently distributed by King Features, which is pretty good about making publicity materials available, it can be hard to gather info on a lot of them.)

By the way, on March 12, my Popeye article was linked to by lewrockwell.com, an anti-government site that I

hadn't investigated yet (probably because I don't put much effort into seeking them out — anti-government sites just depress me with how inescapable it is, and as often as not are run by people who delude themselves into thinking they're anti-government because they vote Republican). In fact, I found it because of all the traffic it sent my way. Like fark.com, lewrockwell.com posts new links every day, to sites that may be of interest to its readers. Unlike fark.com, lewrockwell.com's readers seem to be adults. It was the same flash-in-the-pan, as far as readership goes (I doubt I picked up many regulars), but this time, they were polite — read what they came for, then went away without hurling any insults.

The reason for the link was the strip I chose to illustrate the article, which they decided showed real insight into how the government creates money. King Blozo of Nazilia alleviates his country's budget deficit and shows Popeye a trick at the same time, by waving his hands over a pile of counterfeit money, whereupon it becomes real. Popeye: "Blow me down!"

(It was only later that I discovered a likely way they'd happened to find the article. Two days earlier, a guy named Jesse Walker had posted a link to just the illustration on reason.com's "Hit & Run" page, which seems to be some sort of multi-person blog. I'd recently added software to the site to prevent anyone accessing my illustrations from any other domain (image leeching was starting to cost me real money), so it wouldn't come up — but apparently, Lew Rockwell (or whoever webmasters the site for him) figured out how to find the whole article from that link, and went from there.)

## Duck Tape ReDucks

Interesting little sidebar to something I wrote in the January issue. I had a section on what I called "Duck Tape", noting that I was aware that wasn't the preferred spelling, but it was the spelling I preferred.

I found out since then that "Duck Tape" actually was the original spelling. It goes back to World War II, when it was given that name because water would roll off it just as it does from a duck's back. How the incorrect version, "Duct Tape", came into use is unexplained.

Meanwhile, in all my extolling of the virtues of Duck Tape, I would never **dream** of suggesting it might be useful in preventing poison gas from seeping into houses. A ridiculous lie like that could only have been uttered by a politician, and could only have been believed by the kind of "moron" who thinks the Republican Party stands for less government.

One Internet column I regularly read observed that this was merely a revival of the old 1950s "Duck and Cover" routine, where school children were told they could protect themselves from a nuclear attack by crouching on the floor. (For those too young to remember and too smart to believe anyone would actually make a stupid claim like that, I assure you, it really happened.)

(That column, by the way, is where I picked up the bit about the correct spelling of Duck Tape. It's by Steven Grant, and titled "Permanent Damage". You can read it each week at [www.comichookresources.com](http://www.comichookresources.com).)

I later learned, from *The Washington Post*, that of all the millions of rolls of Duck Tape sold to "morons" in the panicky days following that idiotic claim, no less than 46% were manufactured by an Ohio company founded by a prominent Republican campaign donor named Jack Kahl.

Boy, if Clinton had pulled a stunt like that, the Liberal Press would've been **all over him!** The foofaraw wouldn't have died down for years! If **only** they weren't so **biased** against **Republicans**, we might hear a little more **truth** about this sort of thing!

Just out of curiosity, I wonder who will be the major profiteers from repairing all the Duck Tape damage to walls, doors and windows, and what might be their documentable party affiliation.

By the way — one of the major claims I made about Duck Tape, that it's good for repairing flat tires on bicycles, turns out to be false. It was still holding air when I mailed off the zine, but went flat a few days later, with air seeping out the edge of the tape. It did better than the usual recommended methods, but not as well as I'd like. I'm now experimenting with a little dab of silicone gasket compound underneath the Duck Tape, and that seems fairly promising.

Even more by the way, Steven Grant's Feb. 26 column outlines the past 11 years' history of right-wing radicals' efforts to foment war with Iraq, for transparently self-serving reasons. Even without this, considering their lackadaisical attitude toward North Korea (which **has** nukes, **and** the ability to deliver them onto U.S. cities) — how can **anyone** trust the government so much as to believe there's any decent reason for the U.S. to abandon 200+ years of never launching a preemptive strike (even if the excuses sometimes are rather threadbare), to attack a podunk (but oil-rich) little country like Iraq?

I was going to do some mailing comments to round the zine out (and make the type smaller to fit my requisite six pages), but couldn't find the January mailing. It'll turn up, no doubt. Meanwhile, you'll just have to suffer through my large type and no mailing comments.

## Part II: Written After March 17

A lot of what I wrote in the first part is different now. Nothing major, unless you count the bit directly above about large type. Some things have to be moved from the future tense to the present, others need to move from the conditional to the certain . . . I could go back and do the changes, but just don't feel like it. I'm sure you can make the necessary adjustment.

Here's my take on various items of bullshit that I've been seeing in the media.

### We Must Support The Troops

In the first place, it is quite possible to support individuals without supporting what they're doing. The best support I can even imagine is to hope they're given an opportunity to come home and live their lives normally.

Second, isn't the army, like, **all volunteers** now? I certainly don't wish ill on those who consider it worthwhile to join the army (perhaps under some misguided notion it exists for defense), but I'm afraid I'm unable to muster as much sympathy for them as I did for Vietnam draftees.

### A Quick, Easy Victory Will Quash Dissent

In the short term, maybe, at least in the U.S.. But history will be no kinder to the liars who manufactured this war, and the tyrants who trample our right of free speech to oppose it, than it's been to most other liars and tyrants. The American hegemony may outlive you and me, but it will not last forever, and can only be shortened by the autocratic arrogance with which the current administration conducts foreign affairs. And while history is indeed written by the winners, it is not, ultimately, written by **short-term** winners.

### To Oppose the War Is to Support Terrorism

Puh-leeze! Aside from the fact that no connection between Saddam Hussein and terrorism can be demonstrated, terrorism simply **can't** be stopped by killing or deposing terrorists. That just gives them recruiting slogans. The idea that terrorism can be ended by violence makes no more sense than the idea that prosperity can be created by government control — and look where that got the Soviet Union. Violence begets violence, and that's always been the way of the world. If you want to put a stop to terrorism, a possible first step would be to put a stop to this unconscionable and very ill-advised war.

A guy I know sneers at "liberals" who want to (whiny voice) **understand** terrorists. He (as he proudly proclaims) merely wants to **kill** them.

I suppose that makes some sense, if you're arrogant (and stupid) enough to believe you can make the world a better place by sufficient application of force. My preferred goal, however, would be to **stop** them. And killing terrorists, as we've seen over and over, does **not** stop them. I mean, what do you think? A would-be terrorist decides it's not a good idea to smash a jet into a building because someone might **kill** him?

### Blah Blah France Blah Blah Blah France

Just before closing out the zine, I added one more article the Toonopedia™ — Loopy de Loop, Hanna-Barbera's only theatrical series, for a new total of 597. There were various reasons for choosing it. One, of course, is the oddity, with Hanna-Barbera being known mostly for TV cartoons. Another is just that it's an old Hanna-Barbera — sooner or later, I'll no-doubt have all of those in it. Another reasonable one is that I had a pretty good image for it — a scan of one of Loopy's Little Golden Books.

Then there's the fact that he had a French accent, and I just **felt like** doing something with a French connection. Childish, perhaps, but is it more childish or less, than "freedom fries"? I mean, what next — tearing down the Statue of Liberty because it came from **there**? Might as well — Liberty doesn't seem to mean very much in George W. Bush's America, does it?

But this business of singling out the French as the authors of America's woes is more than just childish —



it's a bald-faced lie, designed to put across the notion that everything would be hunky-dory, and the whole world would fall into line like it's supposed to, if not for one cranky old obstructionist.

There used to be at least **some** element of verisimilitude to that sort of fable — once upon a time, it was possible to point to one old crank with a UN veto that was always getting in America's way. Now, tho, it's the **majority** of the Security Council the U.S. can't win over, with actual veto threatened by no less than **half** the veto-equipped countries that aren't the U.S.

So when Bush says "diplomacy has failed", what he really means is he wasn't able to bully the rest of the world into rubber-stamping his plans for conquest. And when he says he's entitled to act without their approval, what he really means is that he's out of control.

And when he talks about "Old Europe" being against him and "New Europe" being for him, look carefully at what he means by "New Europe". In reality, of course, polls in every part of Europe are about the same — **overwhelming** lack of support for the war. In "Old" Europe, where democracy has been the rule for generations, the governments have some tendency, at least, to go along with the people (Britain being a glaring exception). "New" Europe is the part where they haven't yet gotten the hang of democracy — so of course, the administration's lavish praise for "New" Europe is just one more indication of its fundamental contempt for democratic principles.

And how **ironic**, that it's the legacy of **Communism** that enables them to claim support from "New" Europe.

Of course, the French are said to have ulterior motives, connected with oil wealth, for their stand on the war. To this, all I can say is — so does Bush. The ulterior motives of one lead him to favor a war of naked aggression, without even the possibility of pretense that there's any actual "defense" involved except in his imagined view of what "could" happen in some ridiculous future in which a devastated and (artificially) poverty-stricken country manages somehow to acquire means of **delivering** these weapons he insists exist. And the ulterior motives of the other lead them to **oppose** Bush War II. Need I even state which set of ulterior motives I find morally defensible?

But let us admit, there's always the possibility that they're right, and the war will be short and clean, with the Iraqis cheering the American liberators, and the weapons of mass destruction turning out to be real.

Yeah, right. I can just see people subjected to the "Shock And Awe" treatment (which, if memory serves, used to be called "blitzkrieg" back when it was nasty, evil Nazis doing it, rather than stalwart, morally upright Republicans) cheering the ones who did it to them. In fact, if we **do** see such cheers, I think we'll **know** how free the people are to choose whether or not to cheer.

And the weapons of mass destruction — I dunno. Obviously, Bush knows Iraq has them (he kept the receipts), but whether or not he can convince anyone else, even when the country is completely under his thumb and thus open to his unfettered pillaging, remains to be seen.

Ordinarily, I'd be inclined to believe that yes, they're there — I mean, we know of the existence of at least one country that's **bristling** with the things, and shows only contempt for outside authority. But we've been shown so much unconvincing, specious or even outright **forged** evidence, that credibility for the proposition has become rather thin. And when the UN inspectors who have been scouring the country for them say they can't find any, and can they please have more time to look, I gotta ask — why is Bush so reluctant to give them that time? Is he afraid they'll prove there aren't any?

And given the fact that he's tried, over and over, to put across the idea that it's Saddam Hussein asking for more time, and not the people ostensibly trying to prove his own contentions correct, one must wonder how sincere he is in believing the weapons actually do exist.

As for the short, clean war — we shall see. There's always the possibility of Shock And Awe (which is what Osama bin Laden did to us in '01, isn't it?) triumphing in the first 48 hours, if you want to call that "clean". But there's also the possibility that it'll just piss them off, like terror tactics usually do, leading to hard-fought guerilla action that drags on for years.

And even if the conquest of Iraq goes perfectly well, what then? It's idiotic to think ousting Saddam Hussein will have a desirable effect on terrorism (tho the increase in terrorism that follows with painful predictability from creating more widows and orphans and otherwise dispossessed people in a region that's inclined toward that sort of activity already will simply be cited as "proof" that they "had" to take the guy out). So with terrorism still there and Bush having established he's as ruthless and contemptuous of the rest of the world as he says he is, what do you suppose he'll set his sights on next?

One significant aspect of all this, which I see very little of in the news, is Bush's born-again religious fundamentalism, which he shares with several key members of his administration. For fanaticism and disrespect for human life and freedom, the only thing worse than a Christian fundamentalist is an Islamic fundamentalist.

And the only thing worse than either a Christian fundamentalist or an Islamic fundamentalist is **both**, each bent on shaping the entire world according to his point of view, and each commanding an army willing to kill anyone he sees as standing in the way, no matter how non-combattant.

George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden. What a pair! Ain't **neither** of 'em under control.

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