

an editorial that raises the important questions regarding our uncertain course of action in Iraq. In particular, the author, New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, addresses the dilemma that looms in the not-so-distant horizon—do we increase the military effort or do we end it? He also brings to light the “Downing Street Memo,” which indicates a pre-war orchestration by the President and Prime Minister Blair to the point of cooking intelligence to meet the President’s needs. Mr. Speaker, 87 of my colleagues and I sent the President a letter last week asking him to respond to these serious charges. We await his response.

STAYING WHAT COURSE?

(By Paul Krugman)

Is there any point, now that November’s election is behind us, in revisiting the history of the Iraq war? Yes: any path out of the quagmire will be blocked by people who call their opponents weak on national security, and portray themselves as tough guys who will keep America safe. So it’s important to understand how the tough guys made America weak.

There has been notably little U.S. coverage of the “Downing Street memo”—actually the minutes of a British prime minister’s meeting on July 23, 2002, during which officials reported on talks with the Bush administration about Iraq. But the memo, which was leaked to *The Times* of London during the British election campaign, confirms what apologists for the war have always denied: the Bush administration cooked up a case for a war it wanted.

Here’s a sample: “Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and W.M.D. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.”

(You can read the whole thing at www.downingstreetmemo.com.)

Why did the administration want to invade Iraq, when, as the memo noted, “the case was thin” and Saddam’s “W.M.D. capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea, or Iran”? Iraq was perceived as a soft target; a quick victory there, its domestic political advantages aside, could serve as a demonstration of American military might, one that would shock and awe the world.

But the Iraq war has, instead, demonstrated the limits of American power, and emboldened our potential enemies. Why should Kim Jong Il fear us, when we can’t even secure the road from Baghdad to the airport?

At this point, the echoes of Vietnam are unmistakable. Reports from the recent offensive near the Syrian border sound just like those from a 1960’s search-and-destroy mission, body count and all. Stories filed by reporters actually with the troops suggest that the insurgents, forewarned, mostly melted away, accepting battle only where and when they chose.

Meanwhile, America’s strategic position is steadily deteriorating.

Next year, reports Jane’s Defense Industry, the United States will spend as much on defense as the rest of the world combined. Yet the Pentagon now admits that our military is having severe trouble attracting recruits, and would have difficulty dealing with potential foes—those that, unlike Saddam’s Iraq, might pose a real threat.

In other words, the people who got us into Iraq have done exactly what they falsely accused Bill Clinton of doing: they have stripped America of its capacity to respond to real threats.

So what’s the plan?

The people who sold us this war continue to insist that success is just around the corner, and that things would be fine if the media would just stop reporting bad news. But the administration has declared victory in Iraq at least four times. January’s election, it seems, was yet another turning point that wasn’t.

Yet it’s very hard to discuss getting out. Even most of those who vehemently opposed the war say that we have to stay on in Iraq now that we’re there.

In effect, America has been taken hostage. Nobody wants to take responsibility for the terrible scenes that will surely unfold if we leave (even though terrible scenes are unfolding while we’re there). Nobody wants to tell the grieving parents of American soldiers that their children died in vain. And nobody wants to be accused, by an administration always ready to impugn other people’s patriotism, of stabbing the troops in the back.

But the American military isn’t just bogged down in Iraq; it’s deteriorating under the strain. We may already be in real danger: what threats, exactly, can we make against the North Koreans? That John Bolton will yell at them? And every year that the war goes on, our military gets weaker.

So we need to get beyond the clichés—please, no more “pottery barn principles” or “staying the course.” I’m not advocating an immediate pullout, but we have to tell the Iraqi government that our stay is time-limited, and that it has to find a way to take care of itself. The point is that something has to give. We either need a much bigger army—which means a draft—or we need to find a way out of Iraq.

CONGRATULATIONS TO SARAH
MOELLER

HON. DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate and honor a young

Florida student from my district who has achieved national recognition for exemplary volunteer service in her community. Sarah Moeller of Davie was named one of the top honorees in Florida by the 2005 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, an annual honor conferred on the most impressive student volunteers in each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Sarah, an eighth-grader at St. Mark Catholic School, is being recognized for organizing a clothing drive to collect suits and nice dresses for struggling Haitian immigrants to wear on job interviews and for special occasions. Sarah was inspired when she heard the pastor of St. Joseph’s Haitian Mission speak at her school. Her clothing drive, “PASS Along Your Sunday Best” collected 130 complete outfits, which Sarah would sort, wash, mend, press and hang on hangers for distribution to Haitian immigrants.

When asked what she hoped her efforts would accomplish, Sarah said, “I felt that in a small way I was bringing hope and happiness to people in need.”

In light of numerous statistics that indicate Americans today are less involved in their communities than they once were, it’s vital that we encourage and support the kind of selfless contribution this young citizen made. People of all ages need to think more about how we, as individual citizens, can work together at the local level to ensure the health and vitality of our towns and neighborhoods. Young volunteers like Ms. Moeller are inspiring examples to all of us, and are among our brightest hopes for a better tomorrow.

The program that brought this young role model to our attention—The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards—was created in 1995 by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The program seeks to impress upon youth volunteers that their contributions are critically important and highly valued, and to inspire other young people to follow their example. Over the past eight years, the program has become the nation’s largest youth recognition effort based solely on community service, with more than 170,000 youngsters participating since its inception.

I heartily applaud Ms. Moeller for her initiative in seeking to make her community a better place to live, and for the positive impact she has had on the lives of others. She has demonstrated a level of commitment and accomplishment that is truly noteworthy in today’s world, and deserves our sincere admiration and respect. Her actions show that young Americans can—and do—play important roles in our communities, and that America’s community spirit continues to hold tremendous promise for the future.