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Bush's war boosters: No time to voice regrets

The superstar columnist George Will has an impressive vocabulary. Too bad it doesn't include the words "I'm sorry."

Ten months ago, Will led the media charge when a member of Congress dared to say that President Bush would try to deceive the public about Iraq. By now, of course, strong evidence has piled up that Bush tried and succeeded.

But back in late September, when a media frenzy erupted about Rep. Jim McDermott's live appearance from Baghdad on ABC's "This Week" program, what riled the punditocracy as much as anything else was McDermott's last statement during the interview: "I think the president would mislead the American people."

First to wave a media dagger at the miscreant was Will, a regular on the ABC television show. Within minutes, on the air, he denounced "the most disgraceful performance abroad by an American official in my lifetime." But the syndicated columnist was just getting started.

Back at his computer, George Will churned out a piece that appeared in The Washington Post two days later, ripping into McDermott and a colleague on the trip, Rep. David Bonior. "Saddam Hussein finds American collaborators among senior congressional Democrats," Will wrote.

There was special venom for McDermott in the column. Will could not abide the spectacle of a Congressperson casting doubt on George W. Bush's utter veracity. "McDermott's accusation that the president – presumably with Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice and others as accomplices – would use deceit to satisfy his craving to send young Americans into an unnecessary war is a slander."

During early October, the national media echo chamber kept rocking with countless reprises of Will's bugle call. One of the main reasons for the furor was widespread media denial that "the president would mislead the American people."

An editorial in the Rocky Mountain News fumed that "some of McDermott's words, delivered via TV, were nothing short of outrageous." In Georgia, the Augusta Chronicle declared: "For a U.S. congressman to virtually accuse the president of lying while

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standing on foreign soil – especially the soil of a nation that seeks to destroy his nation and even tried to assassinate a former U.S. president – is an appallingly unpatriotic act.”

Nationally, on the Fox News Channel, the one-man bombast factory Bill O'Reilly accused McDermott of "giving aid and comfort to Saddam while he was in Baghdad." O'Reilly said that thousands of his viewers "want to know why McDermott would give propaganda material to a killer and accuse President Bush of being a liar in the capital city of the enemy.”

A syndicated column by hyper-moralist Cal Thomas followed with similar indignation: "We have seen Reps. Jim McDermott of Washington and David Bonior of Michigan – the Bozos of Baghdad – accuse President Bush of lying for political gain about Iraq's threat to civilization.”

But such attacks did not come only from right-wing media stalwarts. Plenty of middle-road journalists were happy to go the way of the blowing wind.

During one of her routine appearances on Fox television, National Public Radio political correspondent Mara Liasson commented on McDermott and Bonior: "These guys are a disgrace. Look, everybody knows it's 101, politics 101, that you don't go to an adversary country, an enemy country, and badmouth the United States, its policies and the president of the United States. I mean, these guys ought to, I don't know, resign.”

Now that it's evident the president of the United States not only "would" mislead the American people but actually did – with the result of a horrendous war – it's time to ask when such pundits, who went after McDermott with a vengeance last fall, might publicly concede that he made a valid and crucial point.

To use George Will's inadvertently apt words, it was prescient to foresee that "the president – presumably with Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice and others as accomplices – would use deceit to satisfy his craving to send young Americans into an unnecessary war.”

Much more importantly, if a mainstream political journalist like Mara Liasson was so quick to suggest 10 months ago that McDermott resign for inopportune seeking to prevent a war, when will she advocate that the president resign for dishonestly promoting a war – or, failing resignation, face impeachment? ■

Norman Solomon is co-author of "Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You." For an excerpt and other information, go to: www.contextbooks.com/new.html#target