

Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the War on Iraq: Who is John Kerry?

An Open Letter to Senator John Kerry on Iraq

By [Brian S. Willson](mailto:brianwillson.com)

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October 1, 2002

FROM: S. Brian Willson (bw@brianwillson.com)

TO: John Kerry (john_kerry@kerry.senate.org)

Dear John,

It has been a long time since we have had contact. As you might remember, our very first meeting was at VVAW's Dewey Canyon III, "A Limited Incursion Into the Country of Congress," April 19-23, 1971, in Washington, D.C. I'm sure you remember asking the Senate that week in an impassioned speech, "How do you ask a man to die for a mistake?" You also stressed the importance of being "totally nonviolent."

Our second and many subsequent meetings occurred in Massachusetts after you were elected Lt. Governor, 1982-84, while I was active in veteran's issues in Western MA. As director of a veterans outreach center in Greenfield, and the Western Massachusetts Agent Orange Information Project, I served on the Massachusetts Agent Orange Task Force under Governor Dukakis' veterans commissioner and your office as Lt. Governor. I subsequently also served on Dukakis' homeless veterans task force.

When you decided to run for the Senate in 1984 against Ray Shamie, a wealthy businessman, remember that I loyally supported your campaign as one of the dozen or so Vietnam veterans the press called Kerry's Commandos, you called "Doghunters." We accompanied you throughout the state, and fended off right wing criticism from folks such as General George Patton III, who accused you of "giving aid and comfort to the enemy" for your earlier VVAW activities. I'm sure you remember with fondness that critical time that launched you into national office. Your lawyer brother, Cameron, concluded that it was the veterans' support that pulled your first campaign out of a nose-dive and created the necessary "galvanizing energy."

Your critics had suspected that your activities, both in the war, and in years following, were prompted, at least in part, to an intense political ambition, even as you addressed your Yale graduating class with an anti-Vietnam War speech shortly prior to enlisting in the U.S. Navy. Your career in the Senate has revealed your all-consuming ambition, but that is quite typical of politicians.

The first hint of a bit of disconnect in your style was when during your first Senate campaign you denied returning your war medals, with a thousand other veterans, in protest of the war

during Dewey Canyon III. That was a bit of a shock, since for most veterans who returned their medals in that emotional ceremony on Friday, April 23, 1971, it was a very proud and healing moment. Your 1984 campaign response: You had returned the medals of a WWII acquaintance at his direction. All those 13 years everyone thought you had had the courage and leadership to return medals that to veterans who returned them represented medals of dishonor drenched in the blood of innocent Vietnamese who did not deserve to die for a lie, any more than our fellow US Americans. I guess you knew then that you were to be running for office.

The second hint occurred at the celebration party you organized for us “doghunters” at your friend John Martilla’s Beacon Hill house in Boston in late June 1985, 6 months into your term as a junior Senator. In the wee hours of the morning, you made two comments that troubled me: (1) you stressed your initials as “JFK” that would help you one day in your quest for the White House, and (2) that after War Department briefings (and perhaps CIA as well) about the need for funding and training contra terrorists in Afghanistan and Nicaragua you had a new appreciation for their importance in furthering U.S. policies. That did not mean that you necessarily voted for Contra aid but that once in power, information becomes part of an elite circle preempting genuine democracy.

I had driven in from Greenfield for that celebration party, and after those remarks I immediately left the party and drove the two hours home. I never forgot it, obviously.

In late September 1986, you, along with some other Senators and Representatives, reluctantly supported the four veterans (myself being one of them) participating in the open-ended Veterans Fast For Life (VFFL) on the east steps of the Capitol building, protesting aid to the Contras. During that fast one of your fellow Senators, Warren Rudman (R-NH), stated in October 1986 that our “actions are hardly different than those of the terrorists who are holding our hostages in Beirut.” Shortly thereafter, both our VFFL offices and separate housing accommodations were broken into with many files of our activities and addresses of supporters taken. The FBI initiated a “domestic terrorist” investigation of the members of the VFFL which was revealed later when an FBI agent refused to comply and was fired after nearly 22 years service in the agency.

In September 1987, as you remember, I was severely assaulted by a US weapons train in Concord, CA, during a peaceful protest of a Pentagon munitions train moving lethal weapons to Central America, suffering permanent injuries. Later it was revealed that they suspected me of planning to “hijack” the train, and had accelerated the train 12 miles above the legal speed limit of 5 mph rather than stopping and awaiting police arrest.

Such is life. Contra “terrorists” in Nicaragua called freedom fighters by US presidents, while nonviolent protestors of terrorist policies are labeled the “terrorists” to be investigated. Then look what happened with our terrorists, the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Now the Congress is giving the resident of the White House virtual carte blanche authority to launch pre-emptive strikes against more evil lurking beyond our borders. It is a no-brainer to many outside the beltway that we are really experts at knowing how to create rage, then revenge, with our policies of aggression and arrogance.

In the life of being a Senator, John, I’m afraid that your career again proves that power corrupts (and blinds), and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Of course you have many friends in the same camp.

With your vote for essentially agreeing with the selected resident of the White House's request for incredible authority in advance to wage wars against whomever he wants, you have contributed to finalizing the last of the world's empires, and the likely consequent doom of international law, peaceful existence, and hope for the future possibilities of *Homo sapiens*. Of course, it also means that searching for the motivations of other people's rage and desperate acts of revenge will be overlooked, dooming us to far more threats and instability than if we had seriously pursued a single-standard in the application of international law equally with all nations in the first place. We are too much of a bully to do that, and have stated over and over again that the American Way Of Life is not negotiable. Can you understand that this means species suicide?

I'm sorry and terribly fearful for this state we are in. Your vote is terribly misguided, John. Now that veterans have reorganized throughout the nation as once again an important part of the growing movement, know that we shall work hard for your defeat, whether as a Presidential candidate or for another Senate term.

Sincerely,

S. Brian Willson, Arcata, CA
Veterans For Peace

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