

Counteroffensive: Bush Launches 'Operation Cindy Sheehan'

In the heart of Texas, an epic confrontation between Citizen Sheehan and President Bush

By [Ahmed Amr](#)

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"We need to acknowledge Cindy Sheehan as a true American hero who ignited a peaceful democratic insurgency.."

Deep in the heart of Texas, an epic confrontation is taking place between Citizen Sheehan and President Bush. It all started when Cindy Sheehan decided to show up in Crawford to petition her president for credible answers about a war policy that resulted in the death of her eldest son.

As recent polls clearly demonstrate, the majority of Americans are very concerned about the debacle in Iraq. They too want to know about the secret agenda that compelled Bush to spill so much blood and waste so much treasure in Iraq. That helps explain the incredible response to Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a fallen soldier who decided she wasn't buying the administration's shifting rationale for the 'Mess on Potamia.'

So far, Bush has evaded Cindy's attempts to interrogate him on his motives for launching this disastrous venture. In his estimate - Sheehan deserves no meeting and no response. The president has made an executive decision that his job description does not oblige him to divulge the real reasons for invading Iraq.

It's not that Bush doesn't have time to spare. One can only speculate as to the number of hours he has already wasted plotting a plan of attack against the lady from Vacaville. It now appears that the battle plans have been finalized and 'Operation Cindy Sheehan' has already been launched.

Once again, Karl Rove has let the dogs out. A vicious campaign to maul Citizen Sheehan is in play. Instead of answering her questions - the right wing media hacks are focusing on her motives, her mental health, her ideology and her family. These are standard and classic Rovian tactics used to smear administration critics. The predictable pundits at FOX have taken the lead by portraying Sheehan as a treasonous 'crackpot' who is exploiting the death of her son to gain fame and fortune and advance the extremist political agenda of leftist 'anti-American' groups. Hate radio stations across the nations are assailing Cindy's integrity and questioning her patriotism.

The objective of this smear campaign is to draw fire away from Bush. Instead of focusing on the argument between Sheehan and the president - we now have a contest between Sheehan's supporters and her detractors. What started out as a search for the truth is being

reduced to an ideological spat between the left and the right.

The success of the White House plan of attack is by no means certain. Unlike the small band of neo-cons that infest the administration, most Americans are not glued to any ideology. They tend to navigate the political landscape using nothing more than their common sense. Millions of honorable conservatives want answers to Cindy's questions. As for the phantom 'extreme left' in America – it only exists in the imagination of the extreme right, which unfortunately has a very real constituency.

Still, One should never underestimate Karl Rove. The man has an unenviable track record in the smear industry. Vilifying Cindy puts her on the defensive and obliges her to fend off vicious attacks questioning her motives, her agenda and her ideology. My guess is that Cindy is not wedded to any ideology and her only agenda is to stop this senseless war and bring the troops home from Iraq – safe and sound. She does, however, have a motive. She wants George Bush and his merry band of neo-cons to pay a political price for sending Casey Sheehan to an early grave.

The smear campaign against Sheehan has other advantages. It gives the mainstream media a pass from concentrating on George Bush and his failed policies in Iraq. Let there be no doubt that the MSM media barons have as much at stake in this drama as the President. Judith Miller is but one example of the many 'journalists' and publishers who conspired with the White House to market this war of choice and pull off the WMD hoax. So, don't expect them to push the envelope.

Mass Media corporations have transformed themselves into one giant burial ground for this administration's scandals. In covering the Iraq war, the major media outlets have consistently acted as an echo chamber for the rosy projections originating in the White House. In the last month alone, they have dodged the responsibility to cover the Plame case and the AIPAC spy scandal at the Pentagon. Allegations of war profiteering by Dick Cheney and Paul Bremer have been put aside.

Every critic of this war has taken his lumps. Gen. Eric Shinseki was ushered out of the army for suggesting that the occupation of Iraq required hundreds of thousands of foot soldiers. Lawrence Lindsey was dismissed when he estimated that the war would cost up to \$200 billion. The neo-cons berated both men's estimates as being 'wildly off the mark.' We all know what happened to Ambassador Joseph Wilson and Valerie Plame. Hans Blix was publicly defamed, Scott Ritter was ignored and General Anthony Zinni was smeared as an anti-Semite. Former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill was labeled a malcontent. And who now remembers Richard Clarke, the anti-terror adviser, who accused both Bush and Clinton of dropping the ball in confronting Bin Laden prior to 9/11.

On the other hand, the neo-con architects of this quagmire are being handsomely rewarded for their disservice to the nation. Cheney managed to steer multi-billion dollar no-bid contracts to Halliburton. Following in the steps of Robert McNamara, Paul Wolfowitz was promoted to the World Bank. Douglas Feith managed to sneak out the back door of the Pentagon – no doubt with a generous pension and a new assignment at the Israeli Lobby. And Rumsfeld and Condi Rice still retain their positions of power and influence. When did the mainstream press ever question the motives, character and ideology of these individuals? We don't even know if Rummy has kids or if Condi has ever landed a date. When have you encountered stories about Paul Wolfowitz and his Israeli sister or Douglas Feith and his law

offices in Jerusalem? What about Richard Perle and his management position at the Jerusalem Post? It is common knowledge among certain circles in Washington that Wolfowitz, Feith and Perle have spent their entire professional lives working for think tanks that act as fronts for the Israeli Lobby. We don't even know if these people have in-laws – much less what their in-laws think about their Likudnik ideology.

Karl Rove adversary is a white middle class small town practicing Catholic mother who married her high school sweetheart at the age of 17. Cindy Sheehan descended on Crawford armed with nothing more than a few legitimate inquiries about the cause of the quagmire in Iraq. In a single year of political activism – she has managed to earn recognition as a national leader in the peace movement. So far, the Bush administration has vastly underestimated her ability to clearly frame questions regarding the disaster in Iraq. Like, why are we still there and why did we go there in the first place? Who was responsible for the WMD hoax and how can we hold them accountable? When do we bring the troops home and when do we get straight answers?

If we didn't have Cindy Sheehan – we would have to invent her. Millions of Americans have reached the conclusion that this illegal and immoral war was justified by an elaborate campaign of deception orchestrated by neo-con operatives in the administration and the media. A small cabal of mud slinging hooligans posing as journalists and pundits has effectively silenced our collective voice. Neo-con chicken hawks and war profiteers posturing as patriots hijacked the Pentagon while many of us sat passively on the fence as neutral observers. When the fictional WMDs didn't materialize, we gave Bush a pass. Before the first shot was fired, we knew that Iraq had no link to the 9/11 atrocities. Yet, we gave this war mongering administration and its media collaborators a carte blanche.

For Cindy to succeed in her noble mission, we need a sudden outbreak of journalism in America. To do that, we need to shove aside the professional character assassins at CNN and FOX. These media monopolies have become obstacles to the free flow of information. We can never hope to shame the clowns on hate radio. Their shame genes were absent at birth. It is a worthless exercise to expect a rational exchange with those endowed with the intellect of cartoon characters. These right wing hacks specialize in the art of distraction. The best way to get around their attempts to shield the president from having to answer Cindy's questions is to ignore their ideological tantrums and keep pressing for answers from Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice and Congress.

Instead of getting an honest response from the president, Cindy Sheehan is being publicly flogged for daring to challenge the war's rationale. While journalists go on bike rides with president – she ends up doing their job and pressing for answers to some very important life and death questions.

This is not about left or right or center. It's about the truth and accountability. It's about the democratic process that Bush claims to champion abroad. We need a little demonstration of his commitment to democracy right here in America. George Bush has an obligation to provide Citizen Sheehan with credible answers as to why 15,000 American soldiers have been killed and wounded in Iraq. We need to remind those in high office that they work for us and we have every right to question their job performance. And we desperately need to reign in Karl Rove by demanding more information of his role in the Plame games. We also need to give credit to the millions of honorable conservatives and Republicans who have voiced their doubts about George Bush's war and share Cindy's contempt for the neo-cons. And we need to acknowledge the intellectual integrity of the many Americans who

supported the war because they honestly fell for the WMD hoax and Saddam's alleged role in the 9/11 atrocities. If so many of them had not changed their minds – we would not now have a majority of Americans rallying against the war. Last but not least, we need to acknowledge Cindy Sheehan as a true American hero who ignited a peaceful democratic insurgency deep in the heart of Texas. That's the America Casey Sheehan was willing to fight and die for. And that's the America the world admires.

Ahmed Amr is the editor of NileMedia.com

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