

Whistleblowing takes on many forms.... He Didn't Leave Government Service, It Left Him

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Whistleblowing takes many forms but almost always involves the disillusionment of an insider with the nature of what he or she is inside. Leaking secret documents exposing dramatic crimes and abuses is one way to blow a whistle. Another, equally valuable approach, is to publish a lengthy analysis of your experiences in government service. This is what Chas Freeman has done with his new book "America's Misadventures in the Middle East," which he will [discuss](#) in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday.

In 2009, President Barack Obama nominated Chas Freeman to chair the National Intelligence Council. A campaign of lies orchestrated by AIPAC (The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee) blocked Freeman's appointment. As Freeman recounts:

"I withdrew my acceptance of the position. The next day's Washington Post contained three items on this: (1) a front-page account by Walter Pincus detailing aspects of the Lobby's campaign against me; (2) a column by David Broder saying that my resignation was America's loss; and (3) an unsigned editorial calling me a 'crackpot' for imagining that there was an Israel Lobby and that it had opposed me."

Freeman's book consists largely of speeches he made over the past 20 years. Like any insider, he speaks with particular expertise but without exactly the approach outsider activists might consider ideal. Freeman accepts war as a tool of public policy and seems to want the United States' global empire run better, not shut down. Through the course of his pages we progress from his whole-hearted approval of the Persian Gulf War — at which time he ran the world's largest embassy, that of the United States in Saudi Arabia, which he says had "some 550,000 heavily armed 'diplomatic staff' assigned to it" — to his full-throated denunciation of U.S. foreign policy in the age of W. And yet he remains a Potterybarner (now that we're in Iraq we can't just leave). Freeman's attitude becomes more oppositional, but more because of our nation's changes than his own. (I wonder what he makes of Bush I's recent assertion that he would have launched the first Gulf War even had the United Nations not delivered the authorization that Freeman valued at the time.)

Where Chas Freeman excels is in advocating for diplomacy over militarism. While he believed Iraq had WMDs and falsely claims that everyone agreed with that, he nonetheless presented a devastating argument against the 2003 invasion before it happened. (Possessing weapons, after all, is not a moral or legal or strategic reason to launch a war and occupation.) Freeman thinks and writes like a diplomat, and argues persuasively for the value of diplomats' skills.

"I am reminded of the story of a former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mac Toon, a

crusty career diplomat who went aboard an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean for a meeting with the admiral who commanded its battle group. At the end of their discussion, the admiral leaned over to ask, 'What's it like being an ambassador? I've always thought that after I retire I might want to try it.' Ambassador Toon replied, 'That's funny. I've always thought that when I retire, I might try my hand at running a carrier battle group.' The admiral said, 'That's ridiculous. A naval command requires years of training and experience.'"

Here's a crazy thought: what if we were to invest our resources in training diplomats who didn't simply work for the Pentagon but worked for peace? One problem, illustrated by Freeman's experience, is that it's hard to employ anyone in the U.S. government who doesn't answer to the Israeli government. Freeman's critiques of war mongering and incompetence were not what rendered him unacceptable. It was his criticism of the United States' policy of allowing the Israeli government to dictate its positions on the Middle East. Freeman believes that this approach once served the U.S. empire and now no longer does. That's the trouble with public servants who start out believing in their government's approach to the world and support it out of honest conviction rather than blind subservience. When an empire heads into collapse, when its actions become self-destructive, some of its supporters start to speak out against it. Freeman's story also illustrates the problem with putting a radical moron in charge of the empire; Bush made imperialism look bad to its supporters. Obama doesn't seem to have as much of that problem.

Full disclosure: I'm a friend and fan of the publisher of Freeman's book, Just World Books, which has put out more good books in its short existence than many another company: <http://www.justworldbooks.com>

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