

ENTANGLING ALLIANCES

When I read Peter Baker's description of Bush bailing on a NATO meeting early, I guessed that his stated reason for Bush's departure—he was bored—was wrong. After all, Baker notes that Bush was only the third NATO leader to leave the meeting.

Bush was not the first leader to leave while the conversation dragged on. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper were seen leaving before Bush did.

Two leaders with whom Bush should get along splendidly (well, except for the whole tradition of DeGaulle in France), Sarkozy and Harper, bailing before he did. I suspected then that our NATO allies were fed up with the US and close affiliates blaming the French, especially, but also the Canadians and Germans, for not providing enough troops in Afghanistan. After all, I can imagine the Canadians and French thinking, if the US had just heeded allies' warnings about the Iraq War—or even simply abided by international law—the US would have plenty of troops to contribute to the Afghan cause. Why should NATO allies have to pay because the US has degraded its own military so badly?

So I was not surprised to hear Bob Gates announce the US is going to raise our troop levels in Afghanistan (on President Obama's or President Clinton's watch, mind you).

The United States intends to send many more combat forces to Afghanistan next year, regardless of whether troop levels in Iraq are cut further this year, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday.

It is the first time the Bush administration has made such a commitment for 2009.

[snip]

Gates said he advised Bush to make the pledge to allied leaders in Bucharest even though the movement of the unspecified additional troops would ultimately be a decision for the next president, who will take office in January.

And, just as surely, TP reports that our NATO allies were no more interested in helping Bush out with his plans to allow Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance.

Even though Bush was putting “his personal prestige on the line” in supporting membership for the former Soviet Republics, he was forced to check his legacy at the door. NATO rebuffed, a “remarkable rejection of American policy in an alliance normally dominated by Washington.” In fact, some allies even criticized Bush’s “annoying” views on Ukrainian and Georgian membership:

– German and British officials [...] criticized the Bush administration for not coming to grips soon enough with the Ukraine and Georgia problem.

– Bush’s comments added some extra interest while annoying German and French officials, who had said they would block the invitation to Ukraine and Georgia.

– “The debate was mostly among Europeans,” the senior administration official said, acknowledging that several allies had balked at Bush’s stance.

Someone ought to take away Bush's Air Force One privileges, because at this point, he's just making things worse.