



SPEAKING OUT I

Why I Resigned

By JOHN BROWN

On March 10, 2003, I submitted my resignation from the Foreign Service to the Secretary of State. Numerous factors led to this decision, but two stood out. First, I believed that President George W. Bush had failed to present a convincing case to Americans and the world that massive force should be used against Iraq at this particular time. Second, I felt an obligation as an American to speak out against this presidential failure to justify a questionable policy.

My doubts about the president's war plans began in earnest last fall. A Sept. 7, 2002, *New York Times* article, "Bush Aides Set Strategy to Sell Policy on Iraq," drew my special attention. In it, White House chief of staff Andrew Card Jr. said the administration had waited until after Labor Day to kick off its plans to persuade the public of the necessity of war against Iraq because, "from a marketing point of view you don't introduce new products in August." The idea of war as a product to be sold appalled me.

Subsequent readings of press and government statements, which I examined extensively in preparation for the course I was giving on public diplomacy at Georgetown University (as a faculty adviser on detail from the department), failed to convince me of the administration's arguments for war. Indeed, I felt they were not coherent arguments at all,

My resignation was essentially a political statement, for I thought it was important that the media, both at home and abroad, publicize my decision.



but rather crudely presented propaganda: The constant repetition of words and slogans ("weapons of mass destruction," "regime change," "liberating the Iraqi people"), emphasized at some times and not others for no clear reason; the demonization of opponents of the war, from Baghdad to Paris (at least the Vatican was spared); and the appeal to atavistic emotions such as fear of outsiders and shadowy enemies. The White House's efforts to link the tragedy of 9/11 with the need to invade Iraq appeared to me especially tortuous and strained.

I was concerned but not surprised that this crude propaganda, which paid so little respect to the sensitivities of foreign audiences, had failed to persuade the world, even our traditional allies. It was apparent that our public diplomacy,

because of the faulty policy it was presenting in simplistic ways, was failing to offset a growing anti-Americanism throughout the globe.

In mid-January, I witnessed the demonstrations in Washington against the impending war, and I agreed with many of the speakers making a case against a conflict with Iraq. The demonstrators themselves, serious but not solemn, came from a wide cross-section of the U.S., and represented, in my view, the best traditions of dissent in a democracy. I welcomed their slogans — such as "stop weapons of mass distraction" — as a form of mental relief from what I increasingly considered the heavy-handed, Big Brother-like pronouncements of the Bush administration.

The eloquent Feb. 27 resignation letter of my Foreign Service colleague John Brady Kiesling (whom I'd never met) likewise made a strong impression. "The policies we are now asked to advance," he wrote, "are incompatible not only with American values but also with American interests. Our fervent pursuit of war with Iraq is driving us to squander the international legitimacy that has been America's most potent weapon of both offense and defense since the days of Woodrow Wilson." These words were among the most articulate refutations of pre-emptive unilateralism that I had seen.

Continued on page 16