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U.S. Diplomat John Brady Kiesling
Letter of Resignation
to: Secretary of State Colin L. Powell
27 February 2003
New York Times, t r u t h o u t

Editor's Note: What follows is a letter of resignation written by John Brady Kiesling, a member of Bush's Foreign Service Corps and Political Counselor to the American embassy in Greece. Kiesling has been a diplomat for twenty years, a civil servant to four Presidents. The letter below, delivered to Secretary of State Colin Powell, is quite possibly the most eloquent statement of dissent thus far put forth regarding the issue of Iraq. *The New York Times* story which reports on this remarkable event can be found after Kiesling's letter. --wrp

The following is mirrored from its source at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/27/international/27WEB-TNAT.html?pagewanted=print&position=top>

ATHENS
Thursday 27 February 2003

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing you to submit my resignation from the Foreign Service of the United States and from my position as Political Counselor in U.S. Embassy Athens, effective March 7. I do so with a heavy heart. The baggage of my upbringing included a felt obligation to give something back to my country. Service as a U.S. diplomat was a dream job. I was paid to understand foreign languages and cultures, to seek out diplomats, politicians, scholars and journalists, and to persuade them that U.S. interests and theirs fundamentally coincided. My faith in my country and its values was the most powerful weapon in my diplomatic arsenal.

It is inevitable that during twenty years with the State Department I would become more sophisticated and cynical about the narrow and selfish bureaucratic motives that sometimes shaped our policies. Human nature is what it is, and I was rewarded and promoted for understanding human nature. But until this Administration it had been possible to believe that by upholding the policies of my president I was also upholding the interests of the American people and the world. I believe it no longer.

The policies we are now asked to advance 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. We have begun to dismantle the largest and most effective web of international relationships the world has ever known. Our current course will bring instability and danger, not security.

The sacrifice of global interests to domestic politics and to bureaucratic self-interest is nothing new, and it is certainly not a uniquely American problem. Still, we have not seen such systematic distortion of intelligence, such systematic manipulation of American opinion, since the war in Vietnam. The September 11 tragedy left us stronger than before, rallying around us a vast international coalition to cooperate for the first time in a systematic way against the threat of terrorism. But rather than take credit for those successes and build on them, this Administration has chosen to make terrorism a domestic political tool, enlisting a scattered and largely defeated Al Qaeda as its bureaucratic ally. We spread disproportionate terror and confusion in the public mind, arbitrarily linking the unrelated problems of terrorism and Iraq. The result, and perhaps the motive, is to justify a vast misallocation of shrinking public wealth to the military and to weaken the safeguards that protect American citizens from the heavy hand of government. September 11 did not do as much damage to the fabric of American society as we seem determined to do to ourselves. Is the Russia of the late Romanovs really our model, a selfish, superstitious empire thrashing toward self-destruction in the name of a doomed status quo?

We should ask ourselves why we have failed to persuade more of the world that a war with Iraq is necessary. We have over the past two years done too much to assert to our world partners that narrow and mercenary U.S. interests override the cherished values of our partners. Even where our aims were not in question, our consistency is at issue. The model of Afghanistan is little comfort to allies wondering on what basis we plan to rebuild the Middle East, and in whose image and interests. Have we indeed become blind, as Russia is blind in Chechnya, as Israel is blind in the Occupied Territories, to our own advice, that overwhelming military power is not the answer to terrorism? After the shambles of post-war Iraq joins the shambles in Grozny and Ramallah, it will be a brave foreigner who forms ranks with Micronesia to follow where we lead.

We have a coalition still, a good one. The loyalty of many of our friends is impressive, a tribute to American moral capital built up over a century. But our closest allies are persuaded less that war is justified than that it would be perilous to allow the U.S. to drift into complete solipsism. Loyalty should be reciprocal. Why does our President condone the swaggering and contemptuous approach to our friends and allies this Administration is fostering, including among its most senior officials. Has "oderint dum metuant" really become our motto?

I urge you to listen to America's friends around the world. Even here in Greece, purported hotbed of European anti-Americanism, we have more and closer friends than the American newspaper reader can possibly imagine. Even when they complain about American arrogance, Greeks know that the world is a difficult and dangerous place, and they want a strong international system, with the U.S. and EU in close partnership. When our friends are afraid of us rather than for us, it is time to worry. And now they are afraid. Who will tell them convincingly that the United States is as it was, a beacon of liberty, security, and justice for the planet?

Mr. Secretary, I have enormous respect for your character and ability. You have preserved more international credibility for us than our policy deserves, and salvaged something positive from the excesses of an ideological and self-serving Administration. But your loyalty to the President goes too far. We are straining beyond its limits an international system we built with such toil and treasure, a web of laws, treaties, organizations, and shared values that sets limits on our foes far more effectively than it ever constrained America's ability to defend its interests.

I am resigning because I have tried and failed to reconcile my conscience with my ability to represent the current U.S. Administration. I have confidence that our democratic process is ultimately self-correcting, and hope that in a small way I can contribute from outside to shaping policies that better serve the security and prosperity of the American people and the world we share.

John Brady Kiesling

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U.S. Diplomat Resigns, Protesting 'Our Fervent Pursuit of War' **by Felicity Barringer, *New York Times*, 27 February 2003**

UNITED NATIONS -- A career diplomat who has served in United States embassies from Tel Aviv to Casablanca to Yerevan resigned this week in protest against the country's policies on Iraq.

The diplomat, John Brady Kiesling, the political counselor at the United States Embassy in Athens, said in his resignation letter, "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."

Mr. Kiesling, 45, who has been a diplomat for about 20 years, said in a telephone interview tonight that he faxed the letter to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell on Monday after informing Thomas Miller, the ambassador in Athens, of his decision.

He said he had acted alone, but "I've been comforted by the expressions of support I've gotten afterward" from colleagues.

"No one has any illusions that the policy will be changed," he said. "Too much has been invested in the war."

Louis Fintor, a State Department spokesman, said he had no information on Mr. Kiesling's decision and it was department policy not to comment on personnel matters.

In his letter, a copy of which was provided to *The New York Times* by a friend of Mr. Kiesling's, the diplomat wrote Mr. Powell: "We should ask ourselves why we have failed to persuade more of the world that a war with Iraq is necessary. We have over the past two years done too much to assert to our world partners that narrow and mercenary U.S. interests override the cherished values of our partners."

His letter continued: "Even where our aims were not in question, our consistency is at issue. The model of Afghanistan is little comfort to allies wondering on what basis we plan to rebuild the Middle East, and in whose image and interests."

It is rare but not unheard-of for a diplomat, immersed in the State Department's culture of public support for policy, regardless of private feelings, to resign with this kind of public blast. From 1992 to 1994, five State Department officials quit out of frustration with the Clinton administration's Balkans policy.

Asked if his views were widely shared among his diplomatic colleagues, Mr. Kiesling said: "No one of my colleagues is comfortable with our policy. Everyone is moving ahead with it as good and loyal. The State Department is loaded with people who want to play the team game -- we have a very strong premium on loyalty."

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