

APRIL 2

Media strategy memo to George and Dick

Some of the most closely guarded documents in the White House are sure to be the ones written by the president's top media strategist. The public will never get to see the key memos from Karl Rove, but a typical one these days might read something like ...

To: George and Dick

Re: Media Terrain

First, don't worry about Richard Clarke. We'll fix his wagon.

About Condi testifying in public – people forget she can spin with the best. Is history ready for a black female Ollie North with a Ph.D.?

Closer to home now. I say this with the fondest high regard, etc., but both of you need to remember my admonition about looking a bit cartoonish on occasion. George, keep practicing that smile like I told you – it still drifts a little too much toward "What, Me Worry?" – and we sure don't need that in swing states. Repeat after me: "I am not Alfred E. Neuman..."

And Dick. Respectfully. The hunched over talking-into-your-wrists thing has just got to go. I don't know if you and Lynne ever watch "The Simpsons," but I'll give you a DVD. Sometimes when I see you on TV you're a dead ringer for Mr. Smithers. Please watch a couple of "Simpsons" episodes and keep in mind that a lot of viewers actually don't share Smithers' values.

Been thinking about the next media sit-downs. George, I don't want to put you through another "Meet the Press" kind of grilling. Naturally, Matthews over at "Hardball" still wants a shot, but of course he's not the sweetheart Clinton/Gore-basher of yesteryear. For now, we may want to stick with Beachball Jim over at the "NewsHour."

About shoring up the right side of the New York Times op-ed page: I'm trying to find out who can lean on David Brooks without getting his back up. For a right-minded guy he's been something of a disappointment, I have to say, not even as reliable as Bill

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Safire (clearly our best regular over there). Speaking of Safire, let's see if we can do something extra nice – his recent columns spreading our thin stuff about Qaeda and Saddam were quite helpful.

Also at the New York Times, it's great to see Bill Keller backing up Judith Miller. I love his statement posted on the Times website March 25 – "a smart, well-sourced, industrious and fearless reporter with a keen instinct for news ... she has sometimes stepped on toes, but that is hardly grounds for rebuke." Chalabi spins her about weapons of mass destruction before the war, she promptly gets it on Page One as authoritative, and now the top editor is standing behind her. Terrific!

Overall, our echo chamber is sounding good. Lapses aside, Rush is punching the bad guys' lights out. Likewise O'Reilly and the rest of the stallions in the Murdoch stables – especially at Fox News, Weekly Standard, New York Post.

Meanwhile, the Washington Times is true to form. (If our luck holds, the rest of the media won't ever figure out that our dear Rev. Moon over there actually hates America.) And the new squad of editorial-page attack dogs at the Wall Street Journal is performing nicely. If only they could edit the Journal's news pages, we'd be rid of some pains in the neck.

At moments of downbeat news about the campaign, try doing what I do: Think of Ralph Nader. The guy's still telling reporters he's opening a "second front" against us. Is he deluded or disingenuous? Either way, you gotta love him when national polls show how he helps us against Kerry.

One of my favorite Nader claims is that he's going to attract a lot of conservative voters. I didn't even mind Jon Stewart's quip on the subject. ("Conservatives for Nader. Not a large group. About the same size as 'Retarded Death Row Texans for Bush.'") After all, we don't worry about offending the felons vote. Even if they're not waiting to be executed, they've sure had a hard time getting into a voting booth. (Thank you Jeb!) I'm so happy Nader's running again, I almost don't hate tort lawyers anymore.

George, stay on that white horse and remember to leave the nitty-gritty to me. I certainly abhor the title of that book about me ("Bush's Brain"), but a great concept is aptly stated in there: "Bush traveling the high road, Rove pursuing the low." I won't get to Scotland before ya, but I fully intend to see you at the Capitol giving your second inaugural address.

Norman Solomon is co-author of "Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You."