THE PROFESSION

what would you tell the president in three minutes about iraq?

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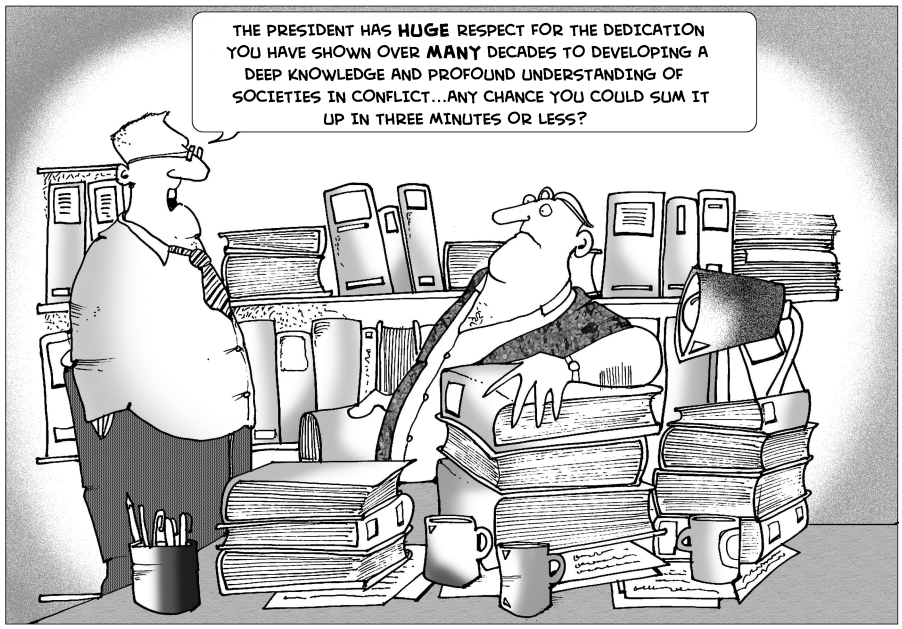
Abstract
A Ph.D. is not a qualification to decide a country's foreign policy, but it should not be a disqualification from communicating with people whose choices are not entirely rational. Founders of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) learned to do this in occupied Europe during the Second World War. I learned it in libraries and working on newspapers. So, instead of talking about Iraq in an Oval Office meeting with President Bush I offered a parable about Northern Ireland, supported by quotations from Max Weber and Isaiah Berlin.

Keywords policy advice; state; conflict; president

The call to the White House came out of the blue. It was a nondescript email captioned 'An invitation' from a sender at nsc.eop.gov. Having worked on presidents and prime ministers for thirty five years, I knew the initials meant National Security Council (NSC), Executive Office of the President.[1]

The invitation was straightforward: 'I am writing to invite you to a small group discussion with President Bush at the White House on May 30. From time to time the President meets with outside experts who can participate in a live and off-the-record discussion focused on an issue of importance. In the proposed session, we are inviting you and three or four other experts in divided societies who, we hope, would be willing to share their perspective on what their research has to say about the current challenges in Iraq.' After expressing regret that travel expenses could not be paid – most of those invited could walk to the White House from their downtown Washington offices – I was politely asked whether a meeting a fortnight hence would work for me. It did.

Iraq certainly qualifies as a problem worth discussing in the White House and I certainly qualified as an outsider. While as a social scientist I have published many millions of words on comparative politics and problems of divided societies,



at no time had I ever focused on Iraq or the Middle East. That was the point of the invitation. It came because I had written two books about a divided society, Northern Ireland. The cover of the first, *Governing without Consensus* (Rose, 1971), showed the British Army in action in Belfast with a big IRA slogan in the background. The cover of the second, *Northern Ireland: A Time of Choice* (Rose, 1975), offered the alternatives of a gun and a ballot box or, as an Irish friend assumed, a gun and a coffin. I started my research there in 1965, booked my hotel room for the Bogside rising a month in advance, and researched Ulster on the ground for a decade and one-half after the killing started in 1969.

I googled the source of the NSC invitation, Peter Feaver, and found he was on leave from a chair at Duke, where he had published five books on security issues and civil–military relations with major university presses. He had worked at the NSC for President Clinton as well as President Bush, and was identified with arguing that the President needed to convince the American people that the war in Iraq was winnable. This was hardly my view but the meeting was not about supporting a particular cause. At no point did he or anyone else ask what my views were (against the war from before the start) or my politics (a Truman Democrat).

A follow-up email made clear what to expect: prepare a 3-minute answer to the question: What are the most important insights from my research about conflict societies that the President may not already have heard and what lessons could be drawn that would be relevant to Iraq right now? The keywords were 'right now', that is, the problem as it actually is rather than what you would have done in 2003 (not gone to war) or what you would do if you became president in 2009 (hope the strife had ended).

POLITICS BEFORE SCIENCE

For those who founded the ECPR in 1970, our political education came from life as

well as from books (see chapters in Daalder, 1997; Rose, 1990). Even if you did not take an interest in politics, politics would take an interest in you. Stein Rokkan, Hans Daalder and Giovanni Sartori spent a year keeping out of the way of German occupation forces. Rudolf Wildenmann started studying about politics as a prisoner-of-war in Canada after being captured while a conscript in General Rommel's Afrika Korps. Juan Linz's childhood was spent growing up behind General Franco's lines during the Spanish Civil War. I was doubly fortunate, being too young for military service and growing up in the United States. Nonetheless, the daily papers and the radio gave me a precocious introduction to the geography of Europe from Dunkirk to Stalingrad.

Books were a means of understanding the causes of the palpable problems that events presented. Being untrained did not mean that one lacked an education. For example, Stein Rokkan read philosophy and French at university and Giovanni Sartori read Hegel, Croce and Gentile while in hiding to avoid the risk of being shot as a deserter from fascist military service. My understanding of politics was deepened by reading comparative literature, starting with the tragedies of the Greeks, then William Faulkner and Sean O'Casey and the tragedy of German history. It was supplemented by such movies as *Open City*, *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds*. An awareness of the tragic dimension in politics was helpful in comprehending the depth of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Politics is about resolving conflict as well as engaging in it. In Weber's terms, this involves an ethic of responsibility rather than ultimate ends. One must understand what one dislikes as well as what one likes. In the introduction to life in *A Normal Totalitarian Society*, Vladimir Shlapentokh (2001: xi) recommends adopting the perspective of a herpetologist, who views the behaviour of snakes

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without becoming emotionally engaged. Working for three years as a reporter on the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* was a good training for seeing many points of view, for a reporter must establish rapport with others in order to get information.

In the scholarly study of the presidency it is of fundamental importance, as Richard Neustadt (1960: vi) stressed, to look at the world from *his* perspective. Since the beginning of Michigan studies of voting behaviour, Americans have more often elected Republican than Democratic presidents. In my writing on that office, I have paid as much attention to understanding presidents who Dick Neustadt, a lifelong Democrat, would never have voted for as to liberal activists (Rose, 1993: 473ff). Moreover, the analysis has always been grounded in a model that emphasised the constraints that the rest of the world imposes on the most powerful man or woman in downtown Washington or Westminster (Rose, 1991, 2001).

CONDENSING KNOWLEDGE IN A PARABLE

An experienced public speaker takes the audience into account when deciding how to present ideas and how long to take in doing so. Thus, I was stimulated rather than frustrated by the need to extract 3 minutes of points from all that I had published about regimes that fall and rise. For a Washington audience, the natural

mode of speech is one-liners rather than the indirect discourse of Mandarin English.

When the day came, I turned up at the White House gate 20 minutes early. The security guards were far more polite and efficient than at airports and ushered me to a West Wing waiting room to meet other group members, all senior scholars. Two were specialists on conflict resolution in Africa, two Arabic speakers familiar with Iraq, and another an expert on constitutions of divided societies.

Walking into the Oval Office was like entering a living room rather than an office–except for a battery of NSC staffers ranged on one side to take notes and watch the President for cues to his thinking. The ranking political scientist in the room, Vice President Richard Cheney, ex-University of Wisconsin, sat silent throughout. The President shook our hands, thanked us for coming, motioned toward two large sofas, offered us a choice of cola or water, and asked us to share our thoughts with him.

When my turn came, I proceeded on the principle of Ernst Dichter, a Viennese refugee turned New York marketing consultant. Dichter advised the makers of the first American cake mix to leave something out, such as an egg, so that a housewife could feel ownership of the cake. I left out Iraq since the relevance of my parable about Northern Ireland was palpable. The point I made was simple – the paramount importance of establishing an effective state – and I quoted Weber (1948) to W.

A divided society can be a stable society – provided that there is a state that has a monopoly of the institutions of violence and prevents foreign and armed incursions across its borders. Northern Ireland lost that monopoly in 1969 (Rose, 1982).

When the authority of a divided society is successfully challenged, it fragments. There is competition in violence between multiple and competing factions. I told the President what John Hume once said to me: 'When they shoot politicians, they always shoot their own side'.

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The British Army found itself trying to defend a state that did not exist and became caught in the crossfire of a civil war. Troops from the outside can support a civil power but cannot substitute for it.

It takes time for armed groups to exhaust their hopes that violence serves their ends and be prepared to agree a political settlement with their armed enemies. In Northern Ireland it took thirty-eight years and more than 3,500 dead. Statistically, this is the equivalent of 140,000 deaths in a country with the population of Britain or 700,000 dead in the United States. What this means in human terms is brought out in the 1,630 double-column pages of *Lost Lives* (McKitterick *et al*, 1999).

The glimmer of good news in the parable was also the bad news – peace and stability is eventually achievable – but warring Iraqis will do more to determine when and how this happens than will outside decision-makers in Washington.

We were told to expect a wide-ranging and free-flowing discussion and this forecast was accurate. Others added reflections about ways of getting people to the negotiating table in war-torn African non-states and recollections of being a graduate student in Iraq in the 1950s. After the President made several references to the importance of liberty, I reminded him that Isaiah Berlin was not only in favour of liberty but also of order. The place to talk about liberty was not in a

discussion about a land lacking order but when he next met President Putin.

The President listened far more than he spoke. His comments were simple yet basic points that many critics avoid such as that he never wanted to be a war president, but after a few young people blew up 3,000 Americans he had to do something. When the conversation became too academic, the President even began leafing through a book of mine that I had given him that ends with a chapter about America's victory over Iraq in Kuwait. That victory left his father riding the crest of a political wave–and afterwards the only path was downwards.

At one point my eyes happened to fix on the busts of two Great War leaders behind the President's chair, Churchill and Lincoln. I thought but did not say that Churchill had a far easier war than Lincoln. The Second World War united Britain and after six years ended in victory. By contrast, Lincoln fought a civil war at the cost of half a million lives in a country whose population was then little more than Iraq today. The peace was lost because federal troops could not control the states that they occupied in a futile attempt to reconstruct the South (Woodward, 1951). Their withdrawal suspended the application of civil rights provisions of the American constitution for almost a century.

Was it worthwhile? The President seemed to think so, for the meeting ran over its scheduled time. If I were being vain, I might claim that his criticism of President Putin the following week in Prague for suppressing liberty was due to my influence. But I doubt that he needed my intervention to say that.

Only after leaving the Oval Office did I realise that my parable had been properly understood. The President asked me one question that no one else ever had: What would have happened had the British not sent troops into Northern Ireland in 1969? My answer was simple: There would have been fighting and deaths but fewer people would have been killed before a new state was established.

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REFLECTIONS ON ENGAGING IN MULTIPLE ROLES

Being a political scientist is not the only role of people who research, teach and study politics. The founders of the ECPR were mobilised into politics by world historical events, and academic engagement was motivated by an effort to understand what could account for the Second World War as it was experienced by winners, losers and neutrals and how to create sustainable democracies in place of the totalitarianisms of left and right.

Becoming an academic was not the only career that could be followed. In Britain Ted Heath, Tony Crosland and Denis Healey went from brilliant careers at Oxford into the Second World War and then into politics. In France, Ecole Nationale d'Administration offered a route from postgraduate study to positions of political influence. Ralf Dahrendorf is exceptional in having followed up a harrowing life under Nazism with both an academic and a political career. It was only the expansion of European universities in the early 1960s that enabled Rudolf Wildenmann and myself to work as academics rather than journalists.

Today, the opportunities and pressures on students of politics are very different than before. The battles that people fight are election campaigns rather than armed conflicts. The training that people receive comes from systematic classroom instruction and computerised analyses rather than from reading the 'ancient' (i.e., pre-1960s) classics of the humanities and the

social sciences. The celebrity instantly conferred by media appearances has replaced the ascriptive and hierarchical statuses of the old *Standesstaat*. In smaller European democracies, there remain opportunities to know political activists, both socially and professionally.

The experiences that led to my 80 minutes of quiet celebrity in the Oval Office were not planned, nor could they have been. However, the capacity to undertake multiple political roles can be cultivated. Students who want to change the world can learn from the study of history and institutions that this is easier said than done, a lesson that American neo-conservatives overlooked. Those who believe that scientific abstractions, whether deductive or mathematical, are applicable to the real world can be encouraged to become involved in real-world situations in which what they exogenise must be endogenised. And academics who spend a lifetime rather than just a few minutes telling others what they know can do so with clarity in public spaces as well as classrooms in efforts to further an understanding of the importance of politics.

Note

1 Portions of this article initially appeared in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, London, 29 June 2007.

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Richard Rose was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1933 and taught himself to type at the age of eight. He has presented papers on politics and public policy in forty-four countries and his dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been translated into eighteen languages plus Samizdat. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and an honorary fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences and the Finnish Academy of Science & Letters and has an honorary doctorate from Orebro University, Sweden. He is a professor of politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen (www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp).