

New York Times' Safire predicts "major terror attack in the US" on eve of 2004 election

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In a column published December 31, *New York Times* columnist William Safire blandly predicts that the "October surprise" affecting our [2004] election" will be "a major terror attack in the US."

This ominous prognostication is given in passing as one of 16 predictions about the new year, in a piece carrying the semi-jocular headline, "Office Pool, 2004." Safire, Richard Nixon's former speechwriter and political aide, and a consummate Washington insider, neither explains nor elaborates on his prediction, and gives no sources. But the off-hand manner in which he posits a major attack on US soil "affecting" the presidential election suggests he is merely echoing a common theme of discussions in the corridors of power of the American capital.

In the column, Safire lists 16 topics, ranging from "the next tyranny to feel the force of US liberation" to the winner of the Oscar award for best picture of 2004. Under each topic, he gives three or four alternatives, and in the concluding paragraph reveals his "picks." In regard to Israeli policy in the new year—item number 16—he says of his prediction: "This last one is pure unsourced thumb-sucking; Sharon didn't return my call."

This remark, notwithstanding its sarcastic tone, implies that Safire's other predictions, including the likelihood of a pre-election terror attack, are based on information provided by serious sources.

The alternatives given by Safire in item 13 on the "October surprise" are: (a) the capture of bin Laden in Yemen; (b) the daring escape of Saddam; (c) a major terror attack in the US; (d) finding a buried bag of anthrax in Tikrit. Safire's pick is (c).

The column appeared in the midst of an

unprecedented mobilization of the military in cities across the US, justified on the grounds of a heightened terror threat. It follows a series of commentaries in the American media suggesting that a major terrorist attack within the US could either shift the 2004 election in Bush's favor, or lead to the election being suspended or cancelled outright. [See "The 'war on terror' and American democracy—some ominous warnings," 27 November, 2003]

Given the record of lies, conspiracies and provocations of the Bush administration, and Safire's well-known connections to the centers of power in Washington and the White House, several obvious questions arise from the New Year's eve column: (1) Who are the sources and what is the information on which Safire bases his prediction of a major pre-election terror attack, and, (2) Is the perpetration, or at least allowance, of such an attack being discussed within government, intelligence or military circles as a serious option for keeping Bush in power in 2004, regardless the sentiment of the electorate?



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