

**THE BLOG**

Sticksandstonesaphobia

By Marty Kaplan

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So what is it, exactly, that Democrats in Washington are afraid of? As they confront the mess in Iraq, what's their worst nightmare?

It's not the fear that they're *wrong* on Iraq. They're not wrong. The President and the Vice President, their Congressional enablers, their neocon apparachiks, their Goebbels caucus in the media circus: *they're* the ones who are wrong, tragically and catastrophically wrong, and they have been all along. The escalation is *not* going to work. Believing otherwise is magical thinking. The Sunnis and the Shiites are not going to embrace; 20,000 troops will not end the civil war. No number of surprise visits by Condi or Cheney will turn the Iraqi "government" into a government; no fantasy will transform Ahmed Chalabi into Giuseppe Garibaldi. And no way will al-Qaeda decide not to fight us "over here" because of *whatever* we do over there. The Middle East is a disaster from top to bottom, and the only question is not — in the infantile, deluded slogans of Bush, Cheney, Fox et al — "how to win," "how to achieve our mission," "how to achieve victory"; the only question is how to play a truly lousy hand to achieve the least bad outcome.

So what are the Democrats afraid of? If they try to stop the war, if they attempt to prevent more brave Americans from dying for a tragic mistake, *they're going to be called bad names*. They'll be called cut-and-runners, slow-bleeders, appeasers, Chamberlains, McGovernites, traitors, surrender monkeys, French. They'll be accused of putting our troops in harm's way, hating America, emboldening our enemies, helping the terrorists, playing into al-Qaeda's hands, being soft on defense, losing the war, making the mistake of Vietnam all over again.

Ok, Democrats, it's time to face facts. The right is *already* saying these things about you. They will keep saying them until the end times. And the media — not just the Fox clowns, but the MSM, which is desperate to get an admiring sidelong glance at their own macho in the Murdoch locker room — will echo those charges.

There is nothing you can do, Democrats, to prevent that. However you name your bills, frame your goals, or craft your strategies, the right, amplified by the media, is going to call you really, really bad names.

Get over it.

Why does it scare you so? Because you're afraid you'll lose the next election?

But you stand with a super-majority of the American people. Virtually every poll says that more than two-thirds of the country believes that the kind of victory Bush talks about is unachievable, that he is not telling the truth, and that we need timetables to get our troops out of there. The Republican position seems scarily powerful to you because you consume too much media. Only on television is Bill Kristol a credible intellectual. Only in a few zip codes is Joe Lieberman a sage. Only in forty column-inches a week is finding common ground with radical right-wing Republican extremists a rational response to insanity. Only in BizarroWorld does Matt Drudge command troops. You have the country on your side, Democrats.

You're afraid that the bad names will stick? That the country is so susceptible to propaganda that you'll be punished for doing the right thing? Here's an antidote to that: Think of Bill Clinton. They said, and still say, everything bad about him that they possibly could. They impeached him. The press wrote him off as a joke. But throughout it, his popularity soared, the people stuck with him, his attackers seemed like demented harpies, and his Vice President, don't forget, won the election in 2000.

Bush has already told us his strategy from now to the end of his term. He will stay in Iraq, and he will ignore all Congressional attempts to change his course. If he succeeds in doing this, Iraq will continue to be a disaster, and it will be up to his successors — Democrats put in Congress and the White House by a mad-as-hell public — to end the war, and, inevitably, to be blamed, by Republican dead-enders and the Republican-intimidated media, for "losing" Iraq.

So either way, you're going to get called bad names.

If you're able to alter the course of the war before Bush's term ends, the right will call it *your* war, and they will blame you for all that follows. This will not prevent you from winning in 2008; I don't think people are that stupid — and if they are, they deserve whatever Republicans they elect in 2008, and those Republicans deserve the whirlwind they inherit.

And if you're not able to change Iraq strategy until the country shows its revulsion for Republican leadership in 2008, and then gives you the White House and perhaps a filibuster-proof Senate, you'll still be called bad names by Rush and Bill-O and all the other bullies on the playground.

No matter what you do, they will lie and libel; no matter how good your chess game, how shrewd your framing rhetoric, they will slander and smear. But that won't break your bones. It won't hurt you with the vast majority of the American public. It will only do you pseudo-harm in the media bubble within which Washington traps you.

So why not, right now, do the right thing?

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