

**THE BLOG**

# Don't Try This Thought Experiment At Home

---

By Marty Kaplan

04/04/2007 02:15 pm ET | Updated May 25, 2011

I'm trying to take President Bush seriously. I'm trying to resist the idea that everything he says is a lie, or a delusion; I'm trying to imagine that he actually thinks what he says, that he's not just a dummy for Rove's or Cheney's or the Saudis' ventriloquism. I'm attempting to give full weight to his words, to believe that what comes out of his mouth on an occasion like his Rose Garden press conference this week is the consequence of a developed worldview, not the petulant braggadocio of a bratty dauphin. Trying to think of him this way is, as he might say, hard work, because his errors-per-hour cry out for truth-squadding rather than empathy, and his imperviousness to reality pretty much demands clinical diagnosis, not diplomatic analysis.

Still, I'm trying. When he says we're going to stay in Iraq until we get the job done; when he insists that victory must be defined militarily, not politically; when he says that there is an "itself" there for the catastrophically divided Iraqis to nevertheless govern, sustain and defend — I'm doing my best to take seriously the commitment of manpower and treasure that he, and his dead-enders in Congress, believe are truly required to accomplish that. There is no mistaking what he means: Americans must stay in Iraq forever. He really believes this is necessary, inevitable and right.

What drove me — watching his press conference — bananas, what finally made me abandon my world-according-to-W thought experiment, was his emphasis on the risk that Iraq poses as a "safe haven," a "sanctuary," for terrorists. If we leave Iraq, he said at his press conference again and again, to the utter boredom of the press corps, that country could turn into a place for future suiciders, future 9/11-ers, future fighters-of-us-here-instead-of-there, to be inculcated and trained. That, he emphasized, would be the most consequential downside of settling for less than victory in Iraq. You see, if we leave, then the bad guys will have places to practice monkey bars.

In other words, the only way to protect America's homeland security is to ensure that no spare acre of Iraqi sand gets used as an Islamofascist boot camp.

Forget, for a moment, a necessary corollary of this policy — that America should also be patrolling every cave and desert and madrassa of Pakistan and Afghanistan, too, not to mention Indonesia, Lebanon, Gaza, and every other plot of ground on the planet where some jihadi dirty dozen might pitch a tent or call a meeting. Forget, too, the power of the Internet to create virtual sanctuaries for terrorists, cyber safe havens for geographically dispersed conspirators. Put aside the phenomenal in-kind contribution to terrorist recruitment that every day of the Bush Administration has provided.

Just look at what George W. Bush well and truly believes. The purpose of America's presence in Iraq is to ensure that our enemies can't conspire there. If that's his real goal — and he says it is — then the notion that he will eventually negotiate a middle ground on troop withdrawal is as delusional as his view that Harriet Miers would make a swell Supreme Court justice. As long as he is President, as long as Republicans are numerous enough in Congress to prevent veto overrides and cloture votes, George W. Bush will keep sending Americans to Iraq. It's the only way he knows to provide homeland security. We are hostages to his implacable vision, pawns of his neocon patriotism, victims of his Gitmo governing philosophy.

Unless, of course, he actually is nuts.

**Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/martykaplan](http://www.twitter.com/martykaplan)**

*Do you have information you want to share with HuffPost? Here's how.*



**Marty Kaplan** 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director