

**THE BLOG**

The Bush Stops Here

By Marty Kaplan

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Low poll numbers must be Kool-Aid. Apparently *W* now thinks he's Harry Truman. Reaching past Richard Nixon, the Republican predecessor whose cellar ratings and contempt for the law he most resembles, Bush told West Point graduates on Memorial Day weekend that actually he has a Democrat for a Doppelganger.

In Bush's mind, the parallels with HST are obvious. Truman built NATO; Bush built the coalition of the willing (you know: Poland, Romania, Azerbaijan, the Solomon Islands...). Truman launched the Marshall Plan; Bush launched the Halliburton Plan. Truman fought the Cold War; Bush fights the Long War (though perhaps Wrong War might be a better name for the 9/11-Iraq bait-and-switch).

Bush = Truman? If only. When supporters shouted "Give 'em hell, Harry!" Truman replied: "I just tell the truth about them, and they think it's hell."

But *W*'s West Point speech was an anthology of untruths about the war that these graduates will now be asked to fight. To take just one example: We attacked Iraq pre-emptively, Bush explained to them, because Saddam refused the UN's order to disarm and disclose. No matter that there was nothing to disarm and disclose, as a worrisome chunk of US intelligence was inconveniently reporting to the White House. No matter that UN arms inspectors were doing their job quite nicely until Bush's determination to go to war forced them to withdraw. No matter that Bush flirted with painting a US plane with UN colors in hopes of provoking Saddam into a rationale for invasion. No matter that shock-and-awe was the plan from the moment the World Trade Center fell, and that the recourse to the UN was a fig leaf. No matter that the sign Truman put on his desk, "The Buck Stops Here," applies to no one in this administration's accountability-free zone.

It was patriotism, a sense of duty and a love of freedom that led Bush's West Point audience to enter our armed forces. It is that spirit, and that sacrifice, which we honor on Memorial Day. It's tragic that these young men and women are being asked to clean up the mess that Bush himself made, to mend crockery that Bush himself broke, to pacify a terrorist breeding ground that Bush himself created. They are willing to risk their lives so that those who went before them to Iraq did not do so in vain; the disgrace is that it is Bush's vanity, not the cause of freedom, that makes their own sacrifice necessary.

It's a saving grace, I suppose, that Bush didn't wear a flight suit to address the graduating cadets. But dressing himself as Harry Truman is the rhetorical equivalent of borrowing a warrior's codpiece, and stuffing it with delusional righteousness.

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