

**THE BLOG**

This Is The Week When Nothing Will Happen

By Marty Kaplan

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“Watershed“? “Pivotal“? “D-Day for Iraq Policy“? Oh, puhleez. President Bush’s prime time stay-the-course speech has already been written. Public opinion has already concluded that the Petraeus report will sugarcoat the statistics, that the Crocker report will move the goalposts, and that “victory” in Iraq will be no less absurd an American mission at the end of the week than at the beginning. Magical September will make Republicans no less likely to wag their lapdog tails at the White House, or to rattle their cut-and-run sabers at the Democrats, than will Magical March, the probable next location of the turning-point mirage. Democrats, for their part, will seize on the possible January withdrawal of one brigade of the surge as a bipartisan triumph, and their fear of being branded anti-troop and pro-terrorist by a bunch of chickenhawk demagogues will lead them to hail a non-binding non-deadline nonconditional footnote to the next defense appropriation as though they had drawn some heroic line in the sand.

This doesn’t mean there will be any lack of yammering this week. The media will cover it with all the fanfare and *ersatz* sobriety that they afford to other pseudo-events, like State of the Union addresses. We will be told over and over how Very Serious these reports are, just as we were told how Terribly Important the report of the Iraq Study Group was. Experts and editorialists will announce how very crucial The Next Six Months — the blogosphere’s beloved Friedman Unit — will be, despite the abundant, Googleable carcasses of previous and equally useless Next Six Months punditry stretching back to Mission Accomplished. There may even be some chatter about the virtues of our system of separation of powers, as though these hearings actually constitute Congressional oversight, as though they were not simply a stage show whose outcome is as foregone as any performance of kabuki.

Sometime during this week, the president is likely to nominate a new attorney general. Chances are, he will choose someone just as willing to sign on to the Cheney doctrine of the unitary (i.e., unconstitutional) executive, and just as amenable to politicizing justice and subverting elections, as Alberto Gonzales. And chances are, despite an insulting in-your-face nomination, Senate Democrats will settle for a little show trial as the only price of confirming the president’s choice, as though tough questioning will make David Addington think twice before issuing a fresh round of thuggish directives to the pliant new AG.

Sometime during this week, the bomb-Iran cabal in the White House will take one unnoticed step closer to its target. It will be a couple of years before we learn the inside dope on what looms as the crowning fiasco of the Bush administration; it will take a few inside dopes covering their asses to Bob Woodward before we discover, too late for it to do any good to the nation, how relentless was the runup to the widening of the war. For the neocons charged with

ensuring that a Democratic president will have no choice but to inherit the whirlwind, the Petraeus/Crocker hearings are merely a caesura in their poem to war. Or who knows: maybe the lack of Congressional consequences for the administration's failure to state and stick to a clear, cogent and achievable mission in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East will be retroactively cited as just the legislative cover that the White House needed to chase Al Qaeda in Iraq into Iran.

This week is also, of course, the anniversary of 9/11. Republican presidential candidates can be counted on for a splendid dick-size tourney, which will be as consequential as any of the pious huffing and puffing we'll hear from the Hill. None of the candidates will brag of a wide stance, but several, no doubt, will boast of an admirably strong stream. Sensible Americans, except for the 20 percent or so who still constitute the Republican base, and except for the media who confuse covering the opinion of an extreme right-wing fringe with covering the issues of a presidential election, will sensibly ignore the adolescent tape-measure antics of the GOP field, just as they have already discounted the Frat-Boy-in-Chief's we're-kicking-ass-in-Iraq delusions.

Will terrorists try something terrible this week? It's possible. It's always possible. And if tragedy strikes, God forbid, it won't be a pseudo-event. But whether it happens or not should be no reason to conclude that the White House deserves unchallenged power and unchecked authority. A bazillion words will be spilled this week about war and terror. But none of them will matter as much as the real blood being spilled in pursuit of a delusional policy which has criminally diverted our urgent attention from a world-wide war with violent Islamic extremists that no outcome in Iraq is going to end.

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