

**THE BLOG**

The (Jonah) Goldberg Variations

By Marty Kaplan

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Jonah Goldberg must think that his declaration — “The Iraq war was a mistake” — will hit the nation like a thunderclap. You know, something like Walter Cronkite saying Vietnam was a mistake, or Tom Cruise announcing that he’s gay.

Goldberg’s apparently concerned that his side-switching will be used by “the antiwar crowd” as vindication of their position. Maybe he fears that Democratic ads in the final days of the campaign will feature his photo (“Hey, look, Harry! If a charter member of the 101st Fighting Keyboarders is against the war, maybe we should be, too!”), rather than relying on video of carnage from Iraq.

Goldberg defines “the antiwar crowd” as those who object “to wars that advance U.S. interests.” I guess he’s talking about all those Democrats who were opposed to World War II. Or perhaps he means all those Republicans who objected to Clinton’s intervention in the Balkans.

So to separate himself from anyone who thinks Bush went into Iraq because of oil, Oedipus, Ozymandias, Halliburton, empire, bases and all those other Defeatocrat canards, Goldberg takes pains to say why he’s turned against the war.

No, it’s not because the WMD case was a lying confection of cherry-picked intelligence. No, it’s not because it was a diversion from hunting al-Qaeda; “calling Saddam Hussein’s bluff after 9/11,” he says, “was the right thing to do.” No, it’s not because “democracy promotion was an afterthought, a convenient rebranding of a war gone sour”; that, says Goldberg, is “unfair.”

So what makes Jonah run? Why was the war a mistake? “The White House did not anticipate a low-intensity civil war in Iraq, never planned for it and would not have deemed it in the U.S. interest to pay this high a price in prestige, treasure and, of course, lives.”

I see. In other words, Bush, Cheney, Rove, Rice and Rumsfeld were as arrogant, vain, blinkered, reckless, cocksure, zealous, impermeable to advice and intolerant of dissent as a majority of the nation has long come to believe.

What kind of flatworm brain did any of these war planners have to have, not to have anticipated a low-intensity civil war? What kind of ideological zealotry was necessary not to have anticipated — even as part of a war game, even as an unthinkable option, even to develop a contingency plan — paying this kind of price in prestige, treasure and lives?

What kind of incuriosity, what slavish obedience to authority, what form of political fundamentalism has to have been on display during four years of wilful blindness to the facts on the ground?

Jonah's solution? It's not cut-and-run, he says, nor is it stay-the-course. You might call it vote-and-run. "I think we should ask the Iraqis to vote on whether U.S. troops should stay.... If they voted 'go,' our values would also be reaffirmed, and we could leave with honor. And pretty much everyone would have to accept democracy as the only legitimate expression of national will." Ah, yes, democracy. I'm sure Jonah was just as enthusiastic about it when it gave us Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, not to mention, say, the Anschluss plebiscite giving 99.73% to the Nazis. It's good to know what kind of figleaf the neocons define as "honor" these days.

In the Book of Jonah, when the Lord tells Jonah to go to Ninevah, "that great city," and prophesize its destruction, Jonah runs away, takes to sea, and eventually ends up in the belly of the beast. When the whale vomits him onto land, the Lord again orders Jonah to tell Ninevah it is doomed. This time, he does. Amazingly, the king and his city immediately repent of their ways. Only then do we learn why Jonah didn't want to obey the Lord in the first place: I *knew* you'd forgive them, Jonah complains to the Lord; I *knew* you'd be a softie.

I've often wondered what's been stopping Jonah Goldberg and his ilk from telling Washington's Ninevites to change their ways and forestall doom. Maybe, like Jonah of old, he was afraid they'd actually comply. Today, I suspect that deep down, what the Project for the New American Century crowd fears more than Nancy Pelosi is James Baker.

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