



The Art of the Flip-flop. How to jump off the defeatist bandwagon without breaking your political neck

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Pity poor Harry Reid. Back in April, the Senate Majority Leader proclaimed the war in Iraq “lost.” Two months before General David Petraeus had in place the reinforcements he needed to implement his bold, new strategy – which included a “surge” of operations against al-Qaeda forces in Iraq – Reid also said: “The surge is not accomplishing anything.”

Since then, it has become increasingly obvious that Reid was wrong, that the “surge” has been accomplishing nothing less than the defeat of al-Qaeda in the very heart of the Arab world. Petraeus’ troops appear to be making progress against Iranian-backed militias as well. As a result, the threat of an Iraqi civil war has diminished and there is no “re-

sistance” movement to speak of – not of Saddam Hussein loyalists and certainly not of patriotic Iraqi nationalists.

The elite media are, belatedly, acknowledging this reality: “By every metric used to measure the war -- total attacks, U.S. casualties, Iraqi casualties, suicide bombings, roadside bombs -- there has been an enormous improvement,” reports the *Washington Post*. The *Los Angeles Times* adds that “war-weary Sunnis and Shiites are joining hands at the local level to protect their communities from militants on both sides.” According to the Pew Research Center: “For the first time in a long time, nearly half of Americans express positive opinions about the situation in Iraq.”

Maybe Senator Reid thinks this is all baloney. But what if he does recognize that progress is being made? What are he and others like him to do? It is not only occupants of the Oval Office who don't relish saying: "I was wrong."

Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA) hasn't said that. He believes the war was "one of the most egregious mistakes in the history of this country." But he adds that to abandon Iraq too soon would be an equally serious error.

"The facts on the ground are the situation is improving in Iraq," Baird recently said on the House floor. "Courageous Americans have given their lives and the time away from their families to make that happen. ... Progress is being made. Do not let anyone today say it is not. Violence is down. Political leaders are reaching out across the aisle. Shias are meeting with Sunnis. Sunnis are meeting with Shias. They need more time to succeed, and an insecure situation will undermine the progress, not further it."

Why can't Senator Reid - and Senators Hillary Clinton and John Edwards and others -- follow Baird's example? Because, unlike Baird, they voted in 2003 to authorize the use of military force in Iraq. In other words, they were for the war when that was politically popular, then they turned against the war when the going got rough and the polls headed south, and now, if they shift again, they fear they will look like triple flip-flopping opportunists.

The temptation to be gleeful should be resisted - most of all by those of us who have been determined to see a successful outcome salvaged in Iraq. Instead, politicians looking for a way back to the pro-victory coalition should be given assistance.

I'll contribute my two cents: Here, Senator Reid, are a few talking points for you and others who may want to jump off the defeatist bandwagon without breaking your political necks:

Say that President Bush should have foreseen that toppling Saddam would create a vacuum - and an irresistible temptation for al-Qaeda and Iran. Say that Bush was foolish to proclaim "Mission Accomplished" when the toughest tasks still lay ahead, and irresponsible to shout "Bring it On" when he was neither militarily nor politically prepared for what was coming. Say it took Bush too long to recognize that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his top generals in Iraq needed to be replaced by commanders with a new and improved strategy.

Say the credit for turning the situation around in Iraq goes to American men and women in uniform. Say America has the most dedicated, courageous and - perhaps most important -- adaptable military the world has ever seen. Say that as much as you think Bush deserves to take more heat, you understand that when a plane crashes it's not just the pilot who burns.

Finally, say you are not among those who regard bad news in Iraq as good news for yourself and the Democratic Party. Say that while you may have been persuaded that

America's defeat in Iraq was inevitable, you were never among those who saw America's defeat as desirable. Such people betray us. You should say that, too.

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