



Pride Clouds Obama's Vision

(Published in *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2008)

Kathleen Parker

Colaboraciones n° 2368

August 4, 2008

Barack Obama concedes that America's troops have contributed to improvements on the ground in Iraq, but he still stands by his vote against the surge.

Why not just admit that he was wrong?

Come on, senator, this is a lot easier than changing churches. Say: "As a proud American, I'm delighted that the surge has worked so we can move forward with my timetable for withdrawal. Look, if I'd known how successful it was going to be, I would have voted for it. At the time it didn't seem like a good bet, but prognosticators go broke in wartime."

See, that wasn't so bad.

Instead, Obama says that even

knowing what he now knows, he still would have voted against the surge. Really? Even knowing that without the surge, he couldn't have safely visited Iraq?

Obama insists that, hypothetically, his own plan might have worked better than the surge: "We don't know what would have happened if I, if the plan that I put forward in January 2007, to put more pressure on the Iraqis to arrive at a political reconciliation, to begin a phased withdrawal, what would have happened had we pursued that strategy."

But we do know. Or at least we can wager with some confidence that had we withdrawn within 14 months, as Obama was proposing at the time -- before Sunni Arabs, once the insurgency's backbone, felt suf-

ficiently secure to turn against the jihadists -- Iraq today would be in bloody chaos, al-Qaeda victorious, and the U.S. further diminished in the Arab world.

Obama voted against the surge, he said then, because he was convinced that inserting 20,000 more troops into Iraq was likely to make things worse, not better. Now trying to justify that miscall, he says he couldn't have anticipated the Sunni Awakening.

Wait. Obama could anticipate that the war in Iraq would go badly. He could anticipate that the surge wouldn't work. But he couldn't anticipate that the Sunnis would turn on al-Qaeda?

Actually, Obama had more information at his fingertips in assessing the probability of the surge's success than he did for any of his other predictions, including assurance from commanders on the ground that local tribal leaders were showing a willingness to take on al-Qaeda.

Most Americans, including many in Congress who approved the Iraq invasion, say that if they'd known then what they know now, they wouldn't have supported the war. Why is it so hard for Obama, knowing what he knows now, to say that he should have supported the surge?

To review Obama's statements on the surge since it began is to understand why: pride.

Over and over again -- even after

Gen. David Petraeus reported in late 2007 that the surge was working -- Obama said: It's not working. It won't work. It's a mistake. He essentially was betting his presidential hopes on the surge's failure.

But the surge did work -- and the mistake is Obama's.

Most Americans would have little trouble forgiving Obama for not believing the surge would be effective. It was a gamble, as are all strategies in war. Even with reports on the ground that locals seemed increasingly willing to rise up, there was reason enough by 2007 to doubt the wisdom of America's commander in chief.

It is less easy to forgive the kind of wrongheaded stubbornness now on display. As recently as July 14, Obama wrote in a New York Times op-ed that "the same factors that led me to oppose the surge still hold true." He mentioned the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, money spent in Iraq and said that the surge had failed to produce "political accommodation."

Fine. But the larger, more important point is that the surge was necessary and successful. Those facts outweigh all other considerations past and present. Moreover, a recent U.S. Embassy report stated that 15 of 18 benchmarks set by Congress for Iraq are being met in a "satisfactory" fashion.

Obama has fallen to pride in part because he has bought his own myth. By staking his future on a

past of supernatural vision, he has made it difficult to admit human fault. The magic isn't working any-

more. And Obama, the visionary one, can't even see what everyone else sees: He was wrong.

© 2008, Washington Post Writers Group