



The Great Betrayal:

Obama's Wars and the War in Iraq



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The Democrats' Big Lie

By David Horowitz

Traditionally, the notion has been that America's political differences stop at the water's edge.

— Barack Obama, June 19, 2012

Four years ago I published a book I wrote with Ben Johnson called *Party of Defeat: How Democrats and Radicals Sabotaged the War in Iraq*. The fate of that book led directly to the writing of *The Great Betrayal*, Daniel Greenfield's revealing analysis of the wars that Barack Obama has conducted in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In *Party of Defeat* we focused on the Democrats' bad faith in supporting the decision to go to war and then turning their backs on it four months later, with American troops in harm's way. For the next five years, Democrats conducted an unprecedented campaign against the war, condemning it as an illegal aggression that was unnecessary and immoral. They accused America's commander-in-chief of lying to them in particular and to the American people in general, in order to manipulate their support for a war that should never have taken place.

As we pointed out in our book, the Democrats' charge that "Bush lied, people died" was itself the biggest lie of the war. Senate Democrats like John Kerry, Jay Rockefeller and Dianne Feinstein sat on the intelligence oversight committee. They had

access to every piece of intelligence data that was available to President Bush. If they had any cause to doubt the reliability of the information provided to them to justify the use of force, they could have summoned the director of intelligence, George Tenet, a Clinton administration appointee, and asked for clarification or additional data. The reason Senate Democrats supported the decision to remove Saddam Hussein was that doing so was a necessity, regardless of whether Saddam possessed WMDs or not, and had been recognized as such by Democrats themselves. The issue was always the character and intentions of Saddam Hussein—a ruler who had launched two aggressive wars in the Middle East, violated the Gulf War truce, defied seventeen UN Security Council resolutions, massacred more than 300,000 Iraqis, used poison gas on the Kurds, was determined to build WMDs and was denying UN inspectors access to his weapons facilities. Regime change in Iraq had been an official American policy since 1998, when President Bill Clinton signed the “Iraq Liberation Act.”

Democrats lied about why they changed their minds in regard to Iraq because the truth was too damning. The reason they turned against the war had nothing to do with the war itself, or the rationale for undertaking it, or misinformation fed to them by George Bush. They turned against the war, after initially supporting it, for purely political reasons.

In the first months of the Iraq War, a Democratic presidential primary campaign was in progress, and an anti-war candidate, Howard Dean, had surged in the polls among Democratic primary voters and was running away with the nomination. It was the desire to win a primary election that caused John Kerry and John Edwards to reverse their positions, turn their support for the war into opposition, and mount reckless attacks on their own government and the party in power. Once they had reversed their

position on the war, they were able to overtake Dean and become the nominees on the Democratic ticket. Up until this turn in the Democratic primary, opposition to the war had been the political cause of the radical left; now it became the official position of the Democratic Party.

The Democrats could not admit the truth—that they had turned their backs on troops they had sent into harm’s way only months earlier because they needed to win an election. So they said—and had to say—Bush lied. There were honorable exceptions to this disgraceful assault, like Joe Lieberman and Dick Gephardt, who sacrificed their presidential ambitions for the good of their country. But the majority of the Democratic Party leadership was now set on a path of unconditional, no-holds-barred attacks on the war whatever the cost.

Opposition to the war was the central theme of the Democrats’ general campaign during the 2004 presidential election. In a debate with Bush, the Democrats’ standard-bearer John Kerry declared Iraq to be “the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time.” This demoralizing attack on a war in progress was made by the same John Kerry who only months earlier had given an eloquent speech on the floor of the Senate in support of the use of force.

Despite the Democrats’ betrayal, neither the Bush administration nor Republican leaders held them accountable. For the next five years, the Democrats continued their attacks on the war, while Republicans treated their sedition as though it were a normal contribution to a foreign policy debate. But in fact it was unprecedented. Ever since the onset of the Cold War, bipartisanship in foreign policy had been the rule, while both parties observed the principle that “politics stops at the water’s edge.” The policy

debate among elected officials over Vietnam was not really an exception. It did not begin until there was bipartisan agreement that America should withdraw its forces, while the debate itself was over how to withdraw, not whether America was an aggressor nation that had violated international law and was conducting a senseless and immoral war against a country that was “no threat.”

The unrestrained and unprecedented attacks on the Iraq War conducted by the Democrats led to a bitter polarization on the home front. The division of the country crippled the effectiveness of the commander-in-chief, and prevented America from effectively dealing with Saddam’s allies in Syria and Iran. This failure has had incalculable consequences for the politics of the Middle East, and also for the security of the United States.

Because of these developments, I was anxious that the book Ben Johnson and I had written should have the widest audience possible. Consequently, I sent the galleys of *Party of Defeat* to prominent conservatives, receiving endorsements from national figures like former Senator Rick Santorum, former UN Ambassador John Bolton, former Clinton CIA director James Woolsey and Fox TV anchor Sean Hannity, who called it “an eye-opening account of one of the greatest betrayals in American history.”

To make sure that the book and its argument were noticed, I also sent copies of the galleys and requests for endorsements to senators and congressmen, including the chairs or ranking members of the Armed Services, Intelligence, Homeland Security and Judiciary committees. The argument laid out in *Party of Defeat* was endorsed by eighteen legislators, including Senators Jeff Sessions, Jon Kyl, James Inhofe and Tom Coburn, and Representatives David Dreier, Mike Pence, Peter Hoekstra, Peter

King, Howard “Buck” McKeon, Lamar Smith, John Shadegg, Ed Royce, Ginny Brown-Waite and Tom Tancredo. All of these legislators signed this statement:

“Party of Defeat is a well-documented and disturbing account of the unprecedented attacks by leaders of the Democratic Party on a war they supported and then turned against. In a democracy like ours, criticism of war policy is legitimate and necessary. But deliberate undermining of a war policy, the authors of this book argue, is a different matter. Every American concerned about the future of their country in the war on terror should consider the arguments in this book.”

When *Party of Defeat* was published in the spring of 2008, I was anxious to see the reaction. But there was none, despite the endorsements from senior Republican legislators responsible for overseeing foreign policy, intelligence and national security matters. Instead there was a deafening silence. Except for the internet magazine I published myself at FrontPageMag.com, not a single review of the book appeared either in print or on the Web. I was used to the blackout from the “liberal” press, and expected it. What I was not prepared for was the silence from conservative reviewers.

I’m not quite sure how to explain this, given the fact that eighteen senior Republicans in Congress had endorsed the book. But I think it is fair to say that ever since the early days of the Cold War, conservatives and Republicans have been generally skittish when it comes to noticing the uncertain loyalties frequently displayed by people on the left in regard to national security. During the Iraq War, for example, the *New York Times* leaked a num-

ber of classified secrets, destroying in the process at least three national security programs designed to protect Americans from terrorist attacks. To embarrass their president and their country, the *Times* also ran stories about the scandal at Abu Ghraib prison on its front page for thirty-two days in a row and more than sixty total, which was more than two and a half times the total number of stories the *Times* ran on the Holocaust and more than ten times the number of its front page features on the Holocaust in the course of the entire Second World War.

Democrats, on the other hand, had no such compunction about questioning their political adversaries' patriotism. Referring to President Bush, former Vice President Al Gore, who had initially supported the use of force, now reversed himself, screaming "He betrayed us!" in a speech before the left-wing organization MoveOn.org. Senator Edward Kennedy called the war "a fraud concocted in Texas" to make money for Bush's friends.¹ These attacks on the moral character of America's commander-in-chief were a gift to America's Islamist enemies and their allies in capitals around the world.

Attacks on the moral character of the leader of the enemy's forces are, in fact, prescribed as the first order of business in psychological warfare manuals. Democrats were now treating their own country's president as though he were commander-in-chief of an adversary's army. Yet Republicans refused to respond in kind, or in a manner appropriate to the offense Democrats were committing. Not a single Republican legislator or spokesperson rose to characterize the Democrats' attacks as the betrayals and sabotage they were. None even suggested that dividing the home front and conducting a propaganda campaign worthy of the enemy was to risk the lives of American men and women in the field. But when one publicity-seeking preacher burned a Koran

in Florida during the Obama administration's war in Afghanistan, Democrats and Republicans alike were quick to condemn him for precisely that reason.

The failure of *Party of Defeat* to gain an audience effectively closed the book on the case we had presented. I made one additional effort to draw attention to it by inviting leading critics of the Iraq War, like *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff and Brookings' Lawrence Korb, to respond to our argument and published the debates in FrontPage Magazine.² But the exercise proved to be futile. Each of the six war critics I invited chose to duck the issue of the Democrats' false claim that Bush had lied, and instead went on to rehash their original critiques.

There was little that was personal in the frustration I felt over this situation. I have written many books and whether one is successful or not is of no great moment. But the fate of *Party of Defeat* was a different matter. And as the long-term consequences of the Democrats' "anti-war" campaign began to unfold, my frustrations increased.

Because of the nature and severity of the attacks on the war in Iraq, the Bush administration was unable to pursue Saddam's fleeing generals and shipments of weapons into Syria, or to punish Iran for supplying the IEDs that were responsible for most of our troop fatalities in Iraq. The paralysis was a direct result of the divided home front, and soon led straight to the destruction of Lebanon and the installation of the terrorist army, Hezbollah, as a regime within the regime. It also emboldened the Islamofascist regime in Iran, which had been able to kill Americans with impunity, to go forward with its nuclear program and step up its war against the state of Israel by supporting the terrorist organization Hamas. Indeed, the Islamist upheaval that is now transform-

ing the Middle East and empowering the jihadists was greatly encouraged by the Democrats' success in blackening America's reputation, defaming American policies and crippling the Bush administration's war on terror—a war that Obama has officially declared over.³

When the policies of the new Obama administration began to unfold in Afghanistan and Iraq—the theaters of war that Democrats had previously attacked—and when Obama then undertook a new war in Libya, which violated every principle the Democrats had invoked to condemn Bush's intervention in Iraq, I felt the need to reopen the discussion and saw an opportunity to do so. In these wars, Obama was daily exposing each of the lies that Democrats had used to sabotage the war on terror. They had attacked Bush for conducting an aggressive war, for detaining suspected terrorists without trial, and for causing civilian casualties. Now Obama was invading a country, Libya, that was “no threat”; blowing up whole families in a noncombatant nation, Pakistan; and using drones to assassinate suspected terrorists without trial. And he was committing all these acts with Democrats' approval.

I therefore asked Daniel Greenfield, a talented and insightful FrontPage writer, to look at these wars that Obama was now conducting, and to place them against the backdrop of Bush's war in Iraq and the Democrats' unbridled opposition to that war. I asked him to call it *The Great Betrayal*. The result is this book.

The Great Betrayal

By Daniel Greenfield

The Iraq War marks a signal moment in America's post-9/11 history. Even before Saddam Hussein was captured, America's decision to remove him from power provoked the greatest domestic opposition to an American war on foreign soil ever. More than a million people demonstrated to prevent their country from enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 1441 and bringing the dictator and mass murderer to justice. The demonstrations against America's intervention, though it had been sanctioned by the UN Security Council and the U.S. Congress, exceeded even the opposition to the war in Vietnam, which had been in progress for four years before any significant protests took place. Moreover, opposing that war was not the policy of the Democratic Party until eleven years after American military advisers had first been sent to Vietnam.

It was only during the McGovern campaign of 1972 that Democrats defected from a war they had led, and joined the left-wing opposition, deriding America's role in Southeast Asia as an "imperial" intervention. By contrast, the Iraq War was only four months underway when the Democratic Party launched a scorched-earth campaign against its own government. Democratic politicians declared a war they had previously supported to be "illegal" and "unnecessary," and they branded a president they had empowered to use military force as a liar who had deceived them and betrayed his country's ideals.

According to Democrats, the war in Iraq was "a war of choice rather than necessity," waged against a country that "was no threat."⁴ In the words of presidential candidate Barack Obama during the 2008 primary campaign, "we were distracted by a war of choice."⁵ It was a distraction, according to Obama and the

Democrats, from pursuing al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Speaker Nancy Pelosi was asked by *60 Minutes* in 2006, “Do you not think that the war in Iraq, now, today is the war on terror?” She replied, “No. The war on terror is the war in Afghanistan.”⁶ But once the elections were over and Obama was in the White House, he discovered his own war of choice in Libya, and Democrats forgot the foreign-policy concerns they had run on.

Saddam Hussein had launched two wars in the Gulf, deployed chemical weapons against his own people, defied seventeen UN Security Council resolutions and engaged American and British airpower in open conflict. Not so Libya, a nasty dictatorship but one that had become a comparatively well-behaved international player. Nor was Libya half the foe that Iraq had been, but a tribal society with one-third the population. It presented no national threat and involved no national interest. Its dictator was not threatening to develop nuclear weapons and was not supporting international terrorist organizations, as Saddam had been doing.

On the contrary, Mohammar Gaddafi had been intimidated by Bush’s display of force into giving up his nuclear and chemical weapons programs and agreeing to self-containment. As Obama’s own secretary of defense declared, there was no national interest at stake in Libya.⁷ America’s intervention was a war of choice, a distraction from the fight against al-Qaeda. In fact, it actually aided al-Qaeda.⁸

For five years the Democrats had accused the Bush administration of creating wars instead of ending them. Now Obama spent his first years in office presiding over three wars, and doing so under false pretenses, but without protests from the left. Obama, for example, misrepresented his Libyan intervention as merely creating a “no-fly zone.” But the no-fly zone was estab-

lished only after the Libyan Air Force had ceased to exist as an aerial fighting force.⁹

The Democrats' 2000 platform vowed that, "As President, Al Gore will not hesitate to use America's military might against Iraq." When President Bush did just that, Al Gore led the Democrats in accusing him of betraying his country. Obama campaigned on a promise to get American troops out of Iraq, but as president he extended for three years the stay of 50,000 soldiers stationed there. To camouflage what he had done, he then renamed the troops stationed there "Advise and Assist Brigades," as though their equipment and ordnance were merely decorative accessories.

During the debates with candidate McCain on the campaign trail, Obama said, "I don't understand how we ended up invading a country that had nothing to do with 9/11, while Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda are setting up base camps and safe havens to train terrorists to attack us."¹⁰ But if there was no reason to be in Iraq, and no terrorist threat that was being checked there, why did Obama keep U.S. troops in Iraq for more than three years of his administration? Obviously, because there was such a threat.

Obama misrepresented his rationale for the war as the pursuit of al-Qaeda, a group that had mostly been driven out of Afghanistan by Bush. Yet Obama's surge in Afghanistan has resulted in two-thirds of all the American casualties there under both administrations.¹¹

In Libya, Obama did not just invade a country that had nothing to do with 9/11; he invaded a country to support the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—the main political force in the Libyan "spring"—which had been linked to al-Qaeda. And he accom-

plished the same service to the Islamic jihad by providing political support to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in Yemen and throughout the Middle East.

Within four months of the inception of the Iraq War, Democrats had turned against the war they previously supported, and accused Bush of lying to secure their support. But they were the liars. How could Bush deceive them about U.S. intelligence data when they had the same access to the data that he did through their membership on the Senate and House Intelligence committees? The policy of removing Saddam by force was not some fraud cooked up in Texas to make money for Bush's friends, as Senator Edward Kennedy actually claimed.¹² It was not the work of an angry son¹³ or a religious fanatic, as per other fantasies floated by Democrats.¹⁴ The policy of removing the Saddam regime was the platform position of the Democratic Party in the 2000 election, and had been the policy of the Clinton administration since 1998.

In fact, as far back as 1991, then Senator Al Gore had criticized President George H. W. Bush for being too soft on Saddam. In 1998, President Clinton lobbed 450 cruise missiles into Baghdad and signed the "Iraqi Liberation Act." In 2002, the leaders of the Democratic Party and its candidates for the nomination, with the exceptions of Dennis Kucinich and Howard Dean, had voted for or supported the resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq.

Unlike the Democrats who in 2000 said that Al Gore would not hesitate to use force in Iraq, Bush did hesitate (not that any of his critics on the left noticed or gave him credit for that). For nearly a year before engaging Saddam militarily, Bush warned the dictator to comply with the sixteen UN Security Council

resolutions that had been passed in a vain attempt to enforce the terms of the truce he had signed at the end of the Gulf War. Bush then sought and got bipartisan support and a Democratic majority in the Senate for the use of force. He sought and got a 15-0 vote in the UN Security Council for an ultimatum to Saddam to comply or face “serious consequences.”¹⁵ Unlike Obama in his Libyan intervention, Bush did not present his fellow Americans with a *fait accompli* or prosecute the war in Iraq under the false pretense of a “no-fly zone” or a nonexistent “potential genocide” (although with Saddam that was an ever present possibility). Nine months elapsed between Bush’s first public warning to Saddam and the entry of U.S. troops into Iraq. Contrary to his Democratic detractors, Bush did not rush into war or conceal his agendas as did Obama, who plunged into hostilities in Libya while neglecting to inform Congress and the American people until days after the war had already begun.

For five years the Democrats had charged Bush with dividing Americans, but every war that Bush fought had more public support than any of Obama’s. Despite the unpopularity of Obama’s Libyan adventure and the cloud of deception under which it was launched, Republicans did not take to the streets to undermine their own country and its troops on the battlefield as did Democrats and their leftist supporters during the war in Iraq.

For five years the Democrats had claimed they opposed wars of choice on principle, wars without congressional approval, wars fought on the basis of incomplete intelligence, wars fought without an imminent threat and wars fought under false pretenses. But the war in Libya showed in a matter of months that for five years they had lied.

Libya: The Unnecessary War

When the Illinois state senator Barack Obama took the stage at an anti-war rally held in Chicago's Federal Plaza in October 2002, he was a virtual unknown. But his ambitions were set high and the machinery of his campaign for United States Senate was already in motion.¹⁶ Speaking to a small group of radicals, he articulated his reasons for opposing a war in Iraq. "Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States or to his neighbors," he said. Obama proposed containing Saddam until, "in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history."

Nine years later, the question raised by Obama's Libyan war was whether Gaddafi had posed an "imminent and direct threat to the United States or to his neighbors," and if not, why couldn't he also have been contained until he fell into that dustbin of history? But not even the war's most passionate defenders contended that Gaddafi posed such a threat. He had voluntarily shut down his nuclear program in order to improve relations with the United States. By contrast, Saddam had violated seventeen UN Security Council resolutions in a twelve-year effort to keep his weapons programs from public view.¹⁷

Far from being threatening, the Libyan military was much smaller and more inept than the Iraqi military. It had lost every war it had ever fought, including one against African militias in pickup trucks that was known as the Toyota War. Dramatically contrasting with this record of buffoonery was Saddam's aggression against Iran, which was the longest conventional war of the twentieth century and resulted in a combined death toll of over a million. In other words, containment—if that was even an issue—was a no-brainer for Libya, in contrast to Iraq.

In fact, sanctions had helped bring Gaddafi to the negotiating table once; there was no reason to think they could not do so again. But the Democrats who had talked up the power of sanctions against Iraq and Iran—regimes that had never backed off in the face of sanctions—were not interested when it came to a dictator who actually had buckled under them. Unlike Saddam, Gaddafi was afraid of the United States. At the 2008 Arab League summit he warned other Muslim leaders that they faced the same fate as Saddam at the hands of the United States.¹⁸ No less a figure than the UN weapons inspector Hans Blix conceded that Gaddafi had been intimidated into giving up his weapons programs by the Iraq War.¹⁹

In short, Gaddafi had done everything possible to avoid a confrontation with the United States, giving up his weapons programs and humiliating himself in a communiqué to Obama. Gaddafi was in a vulnerable position, fearing the Islamists who were his chief opposition. Accordingly his regime had cooperated with the CIA²⁰ and assisted in the interrogation of Islamic terrorists turned over to it by the United States.²¹ Saddam had taken an opposite path, adding “Allahu Akhbar” to the Iraqi flag and seeking out relationships with Islamist terrorists, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which merged into al-Qaeda,²² and Ansar al-Islam.²³

Even Obama could not seriously claim that the Libyan regime posed a threat to the United States. In his defense of the war to the American people, Obama conceded that there was no threat, saying, “There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are.”²⁴ Of course, this was a case that would justify war with many countries, most particularly Iraq, whose dictator had buried 300,000 of his own people in mass graves and dropped poison gas on the Kurds.

To take Obama's point, then, did the killings carried out by Gaddafi loyalists threaten American values in a way that Saddam's rape rooms, acid baths, plastic shredders and ethnic cleansing campaigns did not? In his opposition days, Obama had condemned the Iraq War as a war "based not on reason but on passion."²⁵ Now he was justifying his own Libyan war by appeals to passion, not reason.

According to Obama, a possible massacre in the city of Benghazi (the kind he had already ignored as a candidate in Iraq and as president in Iran and would later ignore in Syria) was sufficient cause for America's intervention. "It was not in our national interest to let that happen," he said.²⁶

But if genocide was the test, what more urgent cause for American intervention than Saddam's Iraq? Saddam Hussein was not a potential mass murderer but an actual one. His Anfal campaign had covered Iraq in bodies: somewhere between a quarter million and two million people from Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities were dead in its aftermath. In targeted zones, all adult males were executed and thousands of villages were destroyed.

In Libya there were no such prospects on the horizon. In February 2011, the Libyan Human Rights League, a dissident group with every reason to exaggerate the body count, wrote a letter to Obama and the UN secretary general claiming that "hundreds of peaceful protesters" had been shot.²⁷ The following month, as Obama's plans for a no-fly zone were being formulated, news reports were claiming that the death toll had reached a thousand,²⁸ but morgue records showed that the dead on both sides actually numbered in the hundreds. The largest mass grave found contained thirty-four bodies.²⁹ That number was roughly equivalent to an Obama-authorized NATO airstrike on Majer, which alleg-

edly killed a similar number of civilians.³⁰

Obama had said, “We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city nearly the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.”³¹ But no such massacre had occurred in any of the territories under Gaddafi’s control, even as the rebellion faltered. Not even the propaganda arm of the Libyan rebels claimed that the government was carrying out executions on this scale.

“We have seen him hang civilians in the streets, and kill over a thousand people in a single day,” Obama claimed, without actually giving a time or a place where a thousand people had been killed in a single day. The closest thing to such an event had occurred eleven years before and was given mythical status without any independent verification. Called the “Abu Salim prison massacre,” it had been carried out against armed rioting inmates, some of them Islamic terrorists. It was not a massacre of innocent civilians but more like the local version of the Attica prison riot, with an exaggerated body count. After the Libyan rebels claimed to have discovered a mass grave near the Abu Salim prison, a CNN team found that the bones buried there were too large to have come from human beings.³²

Obama’s case for war, then, hinged entirely on an imaginary “genocide.” But during his presidential campaign he had explicitly disavowed the prospect of a potential genocide as an excuse for Bush’s determination to keep troops in Iraq, or as a reason to intervene militarily in Sudan where an actual genocide was taking place. “Well, look,” he said, defending his nonintervention policy in Sudan, “if that’s the criteria by which we are making decisions on the deployment of U.S. forces [i.e., genocide], then

by that argument you would have three hundred thousand troops in the Congo right now, where millions have been slaughtered as a consequence of ethnic strife, which we haven't done.”³³

During a decade of Saddam Hussein's violations of the Gulf War truce and the UN resolutions to enforce it, the media and the left had taken every one of his excuses as a legitimate reason to delay the use of force and give diplomacy “a chance to work.” Gaddafi's offers of a ceasefire, however, were dismissed without a second thought.

A major Democratic line of attack against the war in Iraq was that beginning a new war diverted resources when the United States was already engaged in a war in Afghanistan. But this was no longer a concern when a Democratic president was launching a third war in Libya. Complaints that the United States had not adequately planned for the aftermath of a dictator's fall from power had also been rampant among Democrats during the Iraq War. But not a word of criticism was directed at Obama for failing to consider who stood to gain from the toppling of Gaddafi.

At the anti-war rally in Chicago in 2002, Obama declared that he was opposed only to “dumb wars,” not “smart wars.” A dumb war like Iraq, he warned, would “strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaeda.” The flag of al-Qaeda was never seen to fly over the parliament of liberated Iraq. But it was raised over the courthouse in Benghazi to cries of “Allahu Akhbar” as soon as the rebels seized control.³⁴

Equally ominous, according to NATO, there were massive amounts of weapons—including shoulder-held missiles—littering post-change Libya, with the possibility they could fall into the hands of al-Qaeda, while NATO forces did not have a man-

date to track and account for them.³⁵ This was another crucial difference between Bush's "dumb war," in which the authorities took responsibility for the consequences of regime change, and Obama's "smart war," in which they did not. As the debacle unfolded, the Democrats and their media allies simply averted their eyes from the negative consequences of their efforts, and continued to support a war that had led to the creation of a new terrorist state aligned with al-Qaeda.

The arguments against everything that Obama had done, from launching a war without congressional approval to beginning a conflict without a compelling national interest, had already been articulated by the man doing it. Obama had been against his own war before he decided to wage it. But what did that say about the scorched-earth campaign that Obama and the Democrats had conducted against the war in Iraq, and therefore against America's men and women on the field of battle?

Deceiving the People

In July 2009, Obama was the first American president to shake hands with Mohammar Gaddafi. The occasion was the G8 summit, and the photo of a cheerful Gaddafi and Obama outraged family members of the victims of Pam Am Flight 103, destroyed by Gaddafi's agents. The handshake came five days after Obama's Cairo speech, which opened the gates for the Muslim Brotherhood, as part of an appeasement tour that had included lending legitimacy to the Islamist regime in Turkey and a bow to the Saudi king.³⁶ Two years later, the president appeared in front of two American flags to "update" the American people³⁷ on his undeclared war on Libya, which had already been going on for nine days.

The speech he delivered on March 28 to announce the war was not exactly a declaration of war. The word “war” was not even used except in a compound term, when he mentioned ordering “warships into the Mediterranean.” But whatever mission those warships were on, he certainly didn’t allow that it involved a war. Nor was the speech even a way of informing the American people that a conflict was underway. Instead, Obama described his speech as an “update,” which was an odd choice of words considering that it was the first time he had addressed the nation on the subject of Libya. As an additional layer of disingenuousness, he also implied that any American military action in Libya was already coming to an end.

Understatement, to put the best face on it, was the order of the day. The president’s speech venue was the National Defense University instead of the Oval Office, and his words were timed to conclude before Americans turned to watch *Dancing With the Stars*, whereas in the past the Obama White House had gratuitously interrupted prime-time television programming for less serious matters. The location, the casual address and the early wind-down were the markers of a speech that wasn’t meant to be noticed.

Backdoor as it was, the intervention was an uncomfortable moment for a former anti-war candidate who had run on a platform committed to handshakes not missiles. It became truly awkward when a number of journalists drew comparisons to Bush’s speeches on Iraq. Like Bush, Obama invoked American exceptionalism, urged the nation to stand with those who desired freedom and called for spreading that same freedom around the world. But it was the missing elements that brought out the stark contrasts between the two.

For eight years, Obama and his party had denounced Bush for allegedly deceiving Congress and the American people about the war in Iraq. But when it came his turn to tell Congress and the American people about his own war, he ignored his past declarations and displayed the same lack of transparency he had in other aspects of his administration, failing to announce the war in advance or to secure congressional approval, pretending that the actual announcement was an “update” and telling everyone that America’s military involvement in Libya would be a matter of “days, not weeks.”³⁸ The determination to minimize the consequences of his decision was the exact opposite of the course taken by Bush, who had said, “War has no certainty, except the certainty of sacrifice.”³⁹

The same dissembling marked Obama’s statement of the mission. While Bush had been forthright about his intention to remove Saddam (“the stated policy of the United States is regime change”) and declared on the eve of the conflict that no troops would enter Iraq if the dictator would leave the country within forty-eight hours, Obama insisted—falsely—that regime change was not his goal. “Broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake,” he assured his audience.⁴⁰ The Democrats had falsely accused Bush of lying about the reasons for war. Less than a decade later, their president was lying about the very existence of the war he had started.

Seven long months after the president assured Congress that America’s military action would take days not weeks, and that regime change was not our mission—which was only to enforce a no-fly zone—the American military was still actively pursuing Gaddafi with intent to kill him, in violation of international law. The goal was accomplished when a Predator drone remotely operated from a Nevada base struck Gaddafi’s convoy as he fled

the city of Sirte.⁴¹ A wounded Gaddafi took refuge in a nearby sewage pipe, from which he was snatched and then eviscerated by the rebels. Killing the absolute head of a dictatorial regime is regime change.

In an attempt to establish plausible deniability, NATO issued a statement claiming that it was not aware that Gaddafi was in the convoy.⁴² But similar convoys had already been used to transport members of his family out of the country. Sirte had been under extensive surveillance by NATO and intelligence sources have claimed that an intercepted Gaddafi satellite phone conversation tipped off his location.⁴³ NATO's further claim that the attack was carried out to "reduce the threat towards the civilian population" was a legalism designed to avoid what would have been the absurd claim that an escaping convoy posed a direct threat to the civilian population in Sirte. Instead, killing Gaddafi was presented as an effort to "reduce the threat to the civilian population" by ending the civil war—in other words, the same excuse that was used to invade Libya in the first place.

The British government had been somewhat more forthright about the war than the Obama Administration. When asked about the contradiction between British and American statements on whether Gaddafi was the target and a legitimate one, Senator John Kerry, a major supporter before he was a major opponent of the Iraq War, and a major backer of the Libyan War, told NPR, "The British and the French can speak for themselves. That's not the targeting that the United States understood at the time, and that is certainly not the understanding that I had about that operation."⁴⁴ When informed of Gaddafi's death, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton could hardly contain herself, and responded with a blunter and more candid response: "We came, we saw, he died."⁴⁵

While America's military was hunting down Gaddafi, a covert war was being conducted by British, French and American intelligence units and special forces on behalf of the Libyan rebels. They were acting in furtherance of a "Presidential Finding" authorizing aid to the rebels.⁴⁶ On March 29, a day after Obama told the American people that the mission was strictly humanitarian and that regime change was not his objective, he sat down with NBC's Brian Williams and said that he was not ruling out providing arms to the rebels and that "our expectation is that as we continue to apply steady pressure, not only militarily but also through these other means, that Gaddafi will ultimately step down."⁴⁷

The deceptions came to a head when a spokeswoman at the British embassy conceded that the British military was aiding the rebels, but claimed their mission was different from the U.S.-underwritten NATO operation.⁴⁸ A Pentagon spokesman supported the story of two conflicts allegedly taking place in the same theater of operations—one conducted by NATO, to protect civilians, and the other conducted by NATO members to support the rebels and overthrow Gaddafi.⁴⁹

Nothing the Bush administration had been accused of in regard to the conduct of the war in Iraq came close to this labyrinth of official lies about the mission in Libya. If Bush and Tony Blair, the British prime minister, had attempted to fight a dual war in Iraq—one conducted by NATO under a UN mandate to protect Iraqi civilians and another, at odds with that mandate, to remove Saddam Hussein—their critics would have been up in arms. Many of those critics were now in full-throated support of the Libyan war; but since it was their president committing the deceptions, they weren't bothered.

In his “update” on the Libyan situation, Obama promised more than once that no American troops would be on the ground, which was true as far as it went. But two days after his speech, the *New York Times* reported that CIA operatives were active on the ground.⁵⁰ Libyan rebels also reported that U.S. Special Forces were arming and training them. These were officially referred to as “Sneakers on the Ground.” It was another facet of the contrast between Bush’s open war and Obama’s covert one.

Bush’s plan to overthrow Saddam, which he called Operation Iraqi Freedom, was supported by 62 percent of the American people before American forces were dispatched to Iraq. Obama’s Libyan intervention plan had no public support since the American people were not officially told about it until nine days after it was put into effect. When they were polled after being told what was taking place, only 25 percent of the American people registered their support.⁵¹ The Iraq War still has a higher approval rating than the Libyan war.⁵²

Bush had obtained congressional authorization for the war in Iraq in October 2002, nearly half a year before the Iraq intervention. Two months after Obama committed American forces to Libya, he requested a congressional resolution in support of the war. In brazen disregard for the fact that America’s military intervention had been going on for months, he wrote to Congress, “It has always been my view that it is better to take military action, even in limited actions such as this, with congressional engagement, consultation, and support.”⁵³

To paper over the constitutional problems, Caroline Krass, the head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, wrote up a memo arguing that the War Powers Resolution applied only to “prolonged and substantial military engagements.”⁵⁴ It

was a view that Krass, according to a *New York Times* story, did not herself agree with.⁵⁵ Bill Clinton had notoriously wriggled through a scandal revolving around what the definition of what “sex” is. Obama was now fighting a war whose legality rested on the definition of what a “war” was.

Even Obama’s claims that the war had begun, “pursuant to a request from the Arab League and authorization by the United Nations Security Council” to protect civilians were less than straightforward. Long before the so-called request came through, NATO warships were already being positioned close to Libya to provide “humanitarian relief.”⁵⁶ It was clearly not the Arab League’s request that was the impetus for their presence. The Arab League had only called for a no-fly zone to protect civilians. By the second night of bombing, Amr Moussa, the secretary general of the Arab League, was already condemning the “bombardment of civilians,”⁵⁷ claiming that “what has happened in Libya differs from the aim of imposing a no-fly zone and what we want is the protection of civilians and not bombing other civilians.”⁵⁸

Obama’s reference to Security Council approval was even shakier. A third of the council abstained from voting, including two permanent members. Once the war was underway, the abstaining members quickly condemned the action. Calls for a ceasefire by Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, were ignored by the forces claiming to be operating under the UN mandate.⁵⁹

Obama’s evasions led to moments of complete absurdity. Even the left couldn’t contain its amusement at his claim that the American role in the war was ending because he had transferred responsibility to NATO. The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe was a United States Navy Admiral.

In his letter to Congress, Obama was still insisting that the campaign was solely to protect Libyan civilians. At the same time, rebels were speaking openly of coordinating attacks with NATO⁶⁰ and using technology provided by NATO to transmit their locations.⁶¹ When the capital city Tripoli fell, it was the result of a plan worked out between NATO and the rebels.⁶²

NATO officials still denied that they had any contacts with rebel forces or any mission other than the prevention of attacks against civilians.⁶³ In August, however, the British defense secretary Liam Fox publicly conceded: “I can confirm that NATO is providing intelligence and reconnaissance assets to the NTC (National Transitional Council) to help them track down Colonel Gaddafi and other remnants of the regime.”⁶⁴

American officials continued to issue denials.⁶⁵ During the controversy over Iraq, the liberal media had elevated sixteen allegedly false words in a Bush State of the Union message, which later proved correct, to the status of an international incident. But the same media failed to notice that Obama administration’s reasons for going to war and its stated wartime objectives had been proven false.⁶⁶

The Post-Gaddafi Regime

The Libyan intervention may be not only the most deceptively presented and conducted military intervention that America has ever conducted, but also, viewed in terms of the outcome, the most ill-conceived.

Regime change normally means that new forces will be in charge of the country when the dust of battle settles. On March 29, 2011, ten days after the beginning of “Operation Odyssey

Dawn” and the bombardment of Libyan targets, and a day after Obama’s address “updating” the nation, Admiral Stavridis, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, testified before the House and Senate Armed Services committees, and admitted that he didn’t know who would be the beneficiaries of Obama’s military adventure. The composition of the rebel forces was still being examined, he said, and “at this point I don’t have detail sufficient to say that there is a significant al-Qaeda presence or any other terrorist presence in and among these folks.”⁶⁷ Or not. A day earlier, Vice Admiral Bill Gortney, the director of the Joint Staff, had agreed: “We would like a much better understanding of the opposition. We don’t have it. So yes, it does matter to us, and we’re trying to fill in those gaps, knowledge gaps.”⁶⁸

Was attempting to fill such gaps in our military and political intelligence after hostilities had been initiated (at a time and place of Obama’s choosing) the hallmark of a responsible war?

Both men might have begun filling in their knowledge gaps with Abdel Hakim Belhadj, the commander of the Tripoli Military Council, who had run al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan before he was arrested in Pakistan and turned over to American officials.⁶⁹ As an emir of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, founded by a senior al-Qaeda leader⁷⁰ and still on the government’s list of terrorist organizations,⁷¹ Belhadj was the local version of Osama bin Laden, complete with multiple wives and a mission to turn Libya into an Islamic republic.

The first reason Obama had given for opposing the war in Iraq was that it would “encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world.”⁷² But Obama’s experiments in unguided regime change in the Middle East ended up encouraging the worst of the Arab world. His overthrow of Gaddafi elevated

the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, with its al-Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood affiliations. It destabilized Mali, as Gaddafi's Tuareg fighters relocated there along with the al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansar al-Din group, seizing control of much of the northern part of the country, including the cities of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.⁷³ In Egypt—the largest and most powerful nation in the Arab Middle East—Obama's demand that Mubarak to step down opened the door for the Muslim Brotherhood and assorted Muslim extremists to become the dominant force in Egyptian politics and establish an Islamic state.

The fall of Egypt to Islamic jihadists is the greatest blow to America's interests, and the interests of freedom in Middle East, since Jimmy Carter turned his back on the Shah and brought the ayatollahs to power in Iran. Had the Obama administration thrown its weight behind the Egyptian military, the Brotherhood would have been checked. Egypt would have remained in a precarious state due to Obama's meddling and Mubarak's exit, but it would not have fallen into the hands of the Brotherhood and its Islamist allies. In Tunisia, where the so-called "Arab Spring" began, another American ally, President Ben Ali, was pressured by the Obama administration to make way for the al-Nahda movement, a strong supporter of Islamist terrorists.⁷⁴ Libya concluded the fiasco when the al-Qaeda flag was raised over Benghazi to herald the coming Muslim winter.

Surrendering Iraq

On September 12, 2007, a day after the sixth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, candidate Barack Obama delivered a policy speech on Iraq, setting out his plan to end the war. "Let me be clear: there is no military solution in Iraq, and there never was," he declared. "The best way to protect our security and to

pressure Iraq's leaders to resolve their civil war is to immediately begin to remove our combat troops. Not in six months or one year—now.”⁷⁵

At the time, Democratic candidates were busy competing over which of them as president would end the surge that Bush had launched in Iraq to defeat the terrorists and which of them would withdraw America's troops soonest, leaving Iraqis to the tender mercies of al-Qaeda and other terrorist forces in the field. Obama had vowed to start withdrawing brigades immediately and have all combat forces out of Iraq in sixteen months. “The American people have had enough of the shifting spin,” he said. “We've had enough of extended deadlines for benchmarks that go unmet.”⁷⁶

But once in office, Obama pushed the reset button, demonstrating that the deadline was important only as a means of defeating the Republicans. Once the election was over, the spin shifted and Obama, with the other Democrats in tow, extended the deadlines while the benchmarks went unmet. Sixteen months became nineteen months and then twenty-three months, until the final withdrawal deadline was the same one that had been set by Bush.

The key Democratic argument against Bush's surge in Iraq—which proved successful—was that there was no military solution to the political problem of the sectarian violence, and that withdrawing the troops would make a political solution possible. It was an argument that Obama repeated in his speech, but it was also one that Democrats understood to be both flawed and risky. Had they truly believed that troop withdrawals led to political solutions in sectarian conflicts, they would have called for the withdrawal of the 14,000 international KFOR troops that Bill

Clinton had put in Kosovo more than a decade earlier and were still there. But they didn't believe it. Not in Kosovo nor in Iraq. Therefore, Obama not only did not meet the sixteen-month deadline he had set, he extended it, and did so in the most deceptive way possible.

In regard to this and other Bush-era policies, Obama had to face the fact that the policies were practical and therefore sound, without appearing to do so. Immediate withdrawal of the troops from Iraq would gratify his left-wing base, but would also have dangerous real-world consequences for which he would be held responsible. Even during the election campaign, while he was criticizing other candidates for irresponsible timelines, Obama had made a gesture of warning as to how risky a premature pull-out would be.

As in Libya, where he was faced with a conflict between his anti-war positions and a war policy he wanted to carry out, his chosen solution was a semantic sleight of hand. As the sixteen-month deadline expired, he gave Operation Iraqi Freedom a name change to "Operation New Dawn." His secretary of defense explained that "aligning the name change with the change of mission sends a strong signal that Operation Iraqi Freedom has ended and our forces are operating under a new mission."⁷⁷ The 50,000 soldiers still on the field of battle also received a name change. They were now members of "Advise and Assist Brigades."⁷⁸ The memo touting the name change was being introduced in February 2010, when Vice President Biden appeared on Larry King Live to boast that he was "very optimistic about—about Iraq ... this could be one of the great achievements of this administration."⁷⁹ Suddenly the war in Iraq had been sanitized. It was no longer Bush's failed war. It was now Obama's successful peace.



Under the new brand, the Obama administration now had more “advisors” in Iraq than Kennedy had in Vietnam. But when December 2011 arrived, the liberal media ignored the facelift and dutifully reported the departure of “combat troops” and “the end of the war,” thereby giving Obama—when he eventually did pull out all American troops—credit for ending the war twice.

Had the Bush administration attempted to declare the war over and the troops withdrawn by virtue of a quick rebranding, the media would have howled at such brazen deception. But little was made of Obama’s magical ability to solve his political problems by labeling the same things with different names. His Iraq success was surely an inducement to thinking he could launch a war in Libya if he simply called it something else, and the media would not hold him accountable.

But even that final Bush and Obama deadline wasn’t actually final in Obama’s hands. As it turned out, Iraq’s continuing instability had been understated by the Obama administration. General Austin, the commander of American forces in Iraq, told Republican Senators that 19,000 soldiers would be needed to protect Iraq against external attacks.⁸⁰ In August 2011, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that an agreement was being negotiated with the Iraqi government that would lead to a partial withdrawal, while leaving behind a sizable force to stabilize the situation and protect Iraq from attacks emanating from Syria and Iran.⁸¹ The very existence of the negotiations was an admission that the Obama policy had failed. Not only had Obama’s original proposals been unworkable, but his administration had failed to stabilize Iraq even on the delayed withdrawal timeline that he had originally criticized.⁸²

Throughout this awkward process for him, Obama avoided



closely engaging with Iraq. He stayed away from the subject once elected, except when periodically using it as a club against the Bush administration. Having been forced to admit that the Iraq surge had succeeded, he left the mechanisms in place, but without doing the hard work needed to keep Iraq on track. This same behavior continued even as the withdrawal deadline neared. Rather than make a case to the Iraqi government and the American people for keeping an American military presence in Iraq over the long term, he left it to Biden and Panetta to make the case to the Iraqis, and refrained from using his personal influence and power to obtain the best security arrangement in a country that bordered both Syria and Iran.

Obama's schizophrenic policy came to a head as the White House insisted that it was not seeking to keep American soldiers in Iraq,⁸³ while cabinet members were negotiating with the Iraqi government to do just that. While the American people were being told one thing in public, Iraqi leaders were being told the exact opposite in private. Obama could have broken the deadlock by making it clear that he was committed to Iraq, but going public would have nullified any political benefit from another false withdrawal. It would have been difficult to present Iraq as a success story after conceding that a full withdrawal was unwise. And going beyond the Bush timeline would have made it impossible to blame the former president for the war. Iraq would no longer have been Bush's war; it would have become Obama's.

The two-track process failed in Iraq, but succeeded in America, leaving Iraq unstable, but giving Obama a complete withdrawal to pin on his lapel. The sacrifices of lives and the investments that America had made in Iraq were lost.

Secretary Panetta had been negotiating for a continued troop

presence in Iraq because a full withdrawal would not lead to stability or keep Iran out of Baghdad. Having failed to achieve that goal, Obama nevertheless insisted that he was leaving Iraq stable and secure when that clearly was not the case. As a senator, Obama had dismissed the success of the surge by reaching for another metric: not a decline in violence, but an Iraqi government willing to broker the compromises between Shiite and Sunni factions necessary to create an enduring peace.⁸⁴ By this metric, Obama's drawdown policy in Iraq was a failure. It had not left behind an Iraqi government capable of making those necessary compromises.

The mission was barely declared accomplished before Iraq turned into another Sunni-Shiite standoff. This was not the "sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq" that Obama had said the troops were leaving behind in his self-congratulatory speech at Fort Bragg.⁸⁵ It was more like the Iraq hopelessly mired in sectarian conflict—a prospect that Obama had previously used to excoriate Bush administration.

The disintegration of the Iraqi government along Sunni-Shiite lines represented a profound and tragic failure, but the Obama administration was never held accountable by the media for this failure or for trying to pass off a self-inflicted American defeat as a personal victory for him.

When Bush was commander-in-chief, the Democrats had publicly criticized him for handing over authority in Iraq to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the secretary general of the Tehran-linked Islamic Dawa Party. Howard Dean had accused Maliki of being an anti-Semite.⁸⁶ Senator Clinton wanted to see him replaced with a "less divisive and more unifying figure,"⁸⁷ and Senator Levin had taken up her call.⁸⁸ Senator Durbin and

Representative Pelosi, the House minority leader, had joined in the criticism.

But as soon as it was Obama's watch, they changed their tune. During the New Dawn withdrawal, Pelosi praised Obama for the pullout, and chummily mentioned her visit with Maliki as proof that Obama was doing the right thing.⁸⁹ On the final withdrawal, Pelosi again praised Obama, even though he had left Iraq in the "divisive" Maliki's hands.⁹⁰ When Maliki arrived at the White House at the end of 2011, Obama was struggling to put the best possible face on the situation. Maliki was openly supporting Bashar Assad, who was then massacring his subjects in the streets of Syria.⁹¹ Obama assured the press corps that Maliki's position did not derive from Iranian influence, when it quite obviously did.⁹²

Maliki's behavior undermined every argument the Democrats had made about the stabilizing power of a withdrawal. No sooner did the withdrawal take place than Iraq was on the verge of a civil war, with a fractured government and a showdown between Shiites and Sunnis. Just days after the withdrawal, an arrest warrant was put out for Tariq al-Hashimi, the Iraqi vice president and a leading Sunni figure, who then escaped to Iraqi Kurdistan. The crisis was more than another Sunni-Shiite spat; the fiction of a united Iraq was rapidly unraveling.

In defiance of the Iraqi federal system, Massoud Barzani, president of Iraqi Kurdistan, declared that political agreements with Baghdad were "meaningless," and accused Maliki of acting as a dictator⁹³ and of building a "one-million-strong army" loyal to him personally.⁹⁴ Barzani also suggested a Kurdish referendum, the preliminary first step to any declaration of independence. Hashimi gave CNN an interview in which he denounced

Obama for mischaracterizing post-withdrawal Iraq as free, stable and democratic. “What sort of Iraq we are talking about? How the Americans will feel proud? How the American administration is going to justify to the taxpayer the billion of dollars that has been spent and at the end of the day the American saying, ‘Sorry, we have no leverage even to put things in order in Iraq?’”⁹⁵

Nor was al-Qaeda sleeping. Despite Obama’s stated plan to confront it in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda was back in business in Iraq. The same month that Obama pulled out the last of the troops, al-Qaeda bombings in Baghdad killed sixty-nine people.⁹⁶ The wave of violence continued month after month, with over twenty-five bombings in March 2012 alone.⁹⁷ At the end of March, with the Arab League summit coming up, Baghdad had to be locked down because the American withdrawal had taken away the capabilities and technology to prevent the attacks.⁹⁸

Obama as senator and presidential candidate had insisted that a withdrawal would stabilize Iraq, but the opposite had occurred. The American presence had kept a lid on sectarian tensions and had made progress possible; with the Americans gone, there was no longer any check on Iran or al-Qaeda, and no hope for peace. The sacrifices in Iraq had been wasted. While the media eagerly turned its attention to Egypt and Syria, and its back on Iraq, the storm was breaking over Baghdad.

For five years during the Iraq War, the Democrats had denounced Bush as irresponsible and attacked the morality of the conflict, while American troops were actively engaged in combat. They had tried to defund the war while it was in progress, and force an American defeat. They had done all this in the name of principle—principles which, once they were in office and in charge of the war, they quickly abandoned. Obama’s reversal of

the positions he had taken, with Democrats fully on board, testified to the utter irresponsibility of their attacks on the Bush administration in its conduct of the Iraq War.

The Democrats' reversals were not just hypocritical; they were an admission of guilt. By adopting the policies they had undermined, Democrats conceded (without ever saying so) that they had been wrong to oppose them. But by refusing to admit openly that they had been wrong and insisting that their prosecution of the same policies was fundamentally different, they extended the damage they had done, domestically and abroad. Rather than walking back their divisiveness, they perpetuated it, with Obama rarely missing an opportunity to attack Bush's past policies in Iraq even as he was carrying on many of those policies in the present.

The Consequences of America's Division

Only 139 American soldiers were killed during the liberation of Iraq, but thousands more died in the prolonged occupation, during which the terrorist regimes in Syria and Iran dispatched "insurgents" across their borders. When the Democrats turned against the war, they denied the Bush administration the necessary support and freedom of action to intimidate and contain these jihadist states. Even as Democrats used the mounting American casualties as anti-Bush talking points, their own intransigence was a major contributor to those casualties. Once in office, Obama was all for targeting cross-border bases, conducting raids deep into Pakistan. Had the Bush administration carried out similar raids into Syria and Iran, there would have been a storm of outrage against such aggressive policies; yet the American death toll that the *New York Times* and other anti-war media endlessly bleated about would certainly have been far lower.

Syria, in particular, was heavily invested in ensuring an American defeat. Bashar Assad said of the Iraqi resistance, “We are encouraged by the American failure. It means we are not on the American agenda and the Americans are not going to attack us.”⁹⁹ The alliance between Syria and Saddam’s Iraq had deepened with the ascension of Bashar Assad. When the Saddam regime fell, his generals fled to Syria.¹⁰⁰ Obama’s director of national intelligence, James R. Clapper, then a lieutenant general heading up the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, stated that the heavy traffic from Iraq to Syria before the invasion meant that Iraqi WMDs had unquestionably been transported there.¹⁰¹ High-ranking Iraqi military officials, including General Georges Hormiz Sada and General Ali Ibrahim al-Tikriti, have also stated that the WMDs had been moved to Syria.¹⁰²

The Baath Party regime in Syria at first gave refuge to fellow Baath Party members from Iraq who had been guerrillas, and this assistance evolved into providing a base for al-Qaeda terror. By 2007, fifty to eighty suicide bombers a month were passing through Syria on the way to attack U.S. forces in Iraq.¹⁰³ The United States once again found itself in the same situation as in the Korean War, under siege by an enemy being equipped from cross-border bases that were considered off-limits.

The failure to check Syria and Iran led to a natural alliance between the two terror regimes. Syria and Iran shared common interests in Iraq and Lebanon. After Syria was forced out of Lebanon by the Cedar Revolution, the two countries signed a series of defense agreements dealing in part with military confrontations with the West. Included in this agreement was permission for Iran to store weapons and hazardous materials in Syria.¹⁰⁴

The Syrian-Iranian alliance dealt a fatal blow to the prospect

of a peaceful Iraq. The IEDs, which at one point were responsible for as much as 60 percent of troop fatalities,¹⁰⁵ were coming out of Iran, which had the technology and smuggling infrastructure to supply them to terrorists in Iraq and also Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶ In addition to IEDs, Iran supplied terrorists with Katyusha rocket launchers,¹⁰⁷ RPGs and EFPs, some with serial numbers directly from Iranian weapons factories.¹⁰⁸

The Democratic Party's relentless attacks on the war allowed the jihadist alliance to thrive, with deadly consequences for the region. Lebanon's Cedar Revolution was choked off and replaced by a Hezbollah regime that had Syrian and Iranian backing. Meanwhile, Iran was defying the world with its nuclear program and its brutal suppression of election protesters, a subject about which Obama remained practically mute.

Iran's actions and Obama's apathy emboldened other tyrants to suppress their own political protests, which eventually erupted into the Arab Spring. While the Bush administration had paired democracy with freedom and regime change with stability, his successor was content with "democracy" (i.e., elections however fraudulent) that led to no freedom, and regime change that resulted in no stability. The nations of the Arab Spring became graveyards of hope when the Muslim Brotherhood, which had spawned both al-Qaeda and Hamas, emerged triumphant.

As in Iraq, Obama chose to react rather than act, and to be led rather than lead. The consequences were disheartening. On September 11, 2001, Muslim terrorists had seized a tiger by the tail. The election of Obama and the Democrats' campaign to delegitimize American power and demoralize the war on terror had transformed the tiger into a paper tiger and returned the initiative back to the jihadists. The outcome was a foreign policy

that left the Muslim Brotherhood in charge of Egypt, the Islamist al-Nahda party in charge of Tunisia, al-Qaeda militias in charge of Libya, and Iran in charge of Iraq.

It was the shameful conclusion of a partisan offensive that began when the DNC ran a national campaign with the bullet point “Read His Lips: President Bush Deceives the American People,” the first act of Democratic sabotage against America’s war on terror.

Wars are ultimately tests of will. Without the Democrat-instigated division that allowed the terrorists to believe their attacks could cripple America’s power, there would have been little purpose to their terror and little hope for the Iraqi resistance. With that division obvious, the terrorists continued to supply the war, the America media supplied the images of American war scandals and body bags, and the Democrats profited from both.

Instead of supporting Bush’s accurate portrayal of Iraq as the violator of international law, the Democrats focused their fire on their own government, charging that the United States was the true violator of international law. Rather than holding Saddam accountable for war crimes, they accused the United States and its fighting men and women of war crimes. Senator and presidential candidate John Kerry claimed that Bush had “misled every one of us.”¹⁰⁹ The Senate majority leader Harry Reid said the Iraq War was worse than Vietnam.¹¹⁰ Senator Ted Kennedy said that “We now learn that Saddam’s torture chambers reopened under new management: U.S. management.”¹¹¹ Former Vice President Al Gore wrote, “History will surely judge America’s decision to invade and occupy a fragile and unstable nation that did not attack us and posed no threat to us.”¹¹²

The Democrats were so committed to ensuring failure in Iraq, they not only resisted any action against Syria or Iran, but even opposed the surge, which finally secured the country until Obama gave it up. In 2008, when it was clear even to most of its opponents that the surge had worked, Obama was still asserting that it had failed and that an immediate withdrawal was the only answer.¹¹³ Nine months later, after he rebranded the war as an “advise and assist” operation, he finally conceded that the surge had “succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”¹¹⁴ But this was only by way of preparing Americans for his surrender of what the surge had gained.

As Obama’s withdrawal deadline in Iraq approached, President Barzani of Kurdistan headed to Iran. The Kurds had been America’s staunchest allies during the Iraq War. Now, thanks to Obama, they were forced to turn to the Iranian mullahs to protect their people.¹¹⁵ Barzani had been an opponent of America’s withdrawal, correctly predicting the disintegration of the security situation in Iraq.¹¹⁶ His assessment was shared by all non-Shiite Iraqi leaders, who saw the withdrawal for what it was: their country being ceded to a Shiite majority in thrall to Iran.

Long before the American withdrawal, Iraq disappeared from America’s headlines, slipping out of the national dialogue under a president who avoided talking about what he had done and a media that avoided drawing attention to it. The bombings in Baghdad were no longer proof of a botched foreign policy, and the intense scrutiny that had once been directed at Bush’s policies in Iraq vanished like a mirage in the desert.

In his memoir, Bush wrote of “a moral obligation to leave behind something better” in Afghanistan.¹¹⁷ Obama’s Iraq policy was not animated by any such vision. That emptiness was filled

by an expediency that led to the sacrifice of Iraq and all that Americans had fought for there. The differences between Bush and Obama were more than political. They were moral. In the end, Obama made no effort to leave Iraq a better and safer place than it was. Bush had been animated by such a vision. Obama's discarding of that vision was the final betrayal of a long war.

The Surge Comes to Afghanistan

Obama and the Democrats opposed the surge in Iraq that Bush authorized and General David Petraeus led. When Petraeus was called before Congress in 2007 to discuss the progress in Iraq, he was attacked by Senators Obama, Biden and Clinton.¹¹⁸ At a press briefing, Senator Reid questioned his credibility, accusing him of making "a number of statements over the years that have not proven to be factual."¹¹⁹ The Democrats' allies at MoveOn.org placed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* (for which the *Times* gave a large discount) attacking Petraeus as "General Betray Us."¹²⁰ But when Obama found himself in trouble in his own war in Afghanistan two years later, he turned to the same man and the policy he had previously scorned. "What I'm looking for is a surge," Obama told Petraeus, and put him in charge of the war.¹²¹ The policies that Obama and the Democrats had worked tirelessly to discredit and obstruct in Iraq were now wrapped in new packaging and put into service in Afghanistan.

The embrace of Petraeus by a political establishment that had earlier cast doubt on his competence and called him a liar exposed once again the brazen political calculations behind the Democrats' attacks on the Iraq War and—inevitably—on the soldiers who risked their lives to fight it. Senator Biden had accused Petraeus of being "dead flat wrong,"¹²² and had attempted to justify the "General Betray Us" ad by arguing that "the point they

were trying to make was still valid.”¹²³ But Vice President Biden, facing a losing prospect on the battlefields of Afghanistan, made a 180-degree turn and recommended that Petraeus oversee the war.¹²⁴

Petraeus’s journey from enemy to savior had little to do with the man himself. When he was trying to salvage the war in Iraq, Petraeus was an obstacle to Democratic political ambitions, but when he was needed to salvage the war in Afghanistan, he was vital to them. The unprecedented willingness of the Democrats, for political reasons, to casually smear an American military leader in a time of war, and then retract the smear just as casually, extended to every American soldier who had been defamed by the Democrats and their media apparatus, and to the war itself. Democrats like Congressman John Murtha and Senator Edward Kennedy accused American soldiers of war crimes and compared them to the torturers in Saddam Hussein’s service. In so doing, they exposed a political cynicism at the heart of the Democrats’ attempt to manipulate America’s wars for political gain.

The Democrats’ support for the war in Afghanistan was as much a partisan political calculation as their opposition to the war in Iraq. Democrats knew they could not run on an across-the-board anti-war platform after 9/11 and secure the support of the American people. They had been careful, therefore, to balance their opposition to the war in Iraq with the claim that the “real” war against terrorism was in Afghanistan; that the war in Iraq was a “distraction” and was actually undermining the war on terror. This allowed them to pose as patriots whose passionate attacks on their nation at war were motivated by a desire to defeat America’s “real” enemies—the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Their reasons for prioritizing one war over another were dif-

difficult to rationalize, however. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were both civil wars, with American forces protecting the local governments while carrying out their mission of suppressing insurgent groups and training the indigenous military and police forces. Though the Democrats argued that al-Qaeda was centered in Afghanistan, not Iraq, by the time Obama took office there was actually a more active al-Qaeda presence in Iraq than in Afghanistan. In the fall of 2009, al-Qaeda in Iraq was successfully exploiting the security gap left by the pullout of American forces from Iraqi cities and had begun carrying out some of its deadliest attacks in years.¹²⁵ At the same time, al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was hardly on the radar and not a major threat. The al-Qaeda figure at the center of several current terrorist attacks against Americans was Anwar al-Awlaki, who was operating out of Yemen. Democrats had blamed the Iraq War for diverting resources from fighting al-Qaeda, but now the diversion of troops from Iraq to Afghanistan was actually diverting resources from fighting al-Qaeda.

In their zeal to undermine Bush's war in Iraq, Democrats had developed the idea that al-Qaeda was only in Iraq because of Bush's war. During the election Obama declared, "I have some news for John McCain. And that is that there was no such thing as al-Qaeda in Iraq until George Bush and John McCain decided to invade Iraq... They took their eye off the people who were responsible for 9/11. That would be al-Qaeda in Afghanistan that is stronger now than at any time since 2001."¹²⁶

There was one problem with Obama's assertion. Al-Qaeda was not indigenous to Afghanistan, and during Obama's first year in office the intelligence assessments he received put the number of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan at around a hundred.¹²⁷ In a speech at West Point in December 2009, Obama even conceded

that “Al Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11,” thus clumsily reversing his earlier false statement without actually retracting it or the policies resulting from it.¹²⁸ Not only was al-Qaeda not stronger in Afghanistan than it had been in 2001, as Obama had asserted, but according to statements by General Petraeus earlier in 2009, al-Qaeda was no longer even operating in Afghanistan and its local leadership had moved to Pakistan.¹²⁹

During Petraeus’s testimony before Congress in 2007, Obama had urged him to concede, that it was impossible to make any region al-Qaeda-free. “We don’t anticipate that there’s never going to be some individual or group of individuals in Iraq that might have sympathies toward al-Qaeda. Our goal is not to hunt down and eliminate every single trace, but rather to create a manageable situation where they’re not posing a threat to Iraq or using it as a base to launch attacks outside of Iraq.”¹³⁰

But in approaching the war in Afghanistan as president, Obama set America’s objective as one of denying al-Qaeda any safe havens.¹³¹ These inconsistent standards revealed the practical problem created by Obama’s political approach to the two wars. The major threat that Obama faced in Afghanistan was not al-Qaeda, which had been driven into Pakistan, but the Taliban and local allied elements such as the Haqqani Network. During the Iraq War, Osama bin Laden—who was hiding in Pakistan—had become isolated from the active front of al-Qaeda affiliates throughout the Middle East and lost much of his influence.

Though Obama and the Democrats claimed that the real war on terror was in Afghanistan, they were no more committed to winning the war in Afghanistan than they had been to winning the war in Iraq. Years before, Howard Dean had said that “the

idea that we're going to win the war in Iraq is an idea which is just plain wrong."¹³² Now he repeated his claim in regard to Afghanistan: "I've come to believe that's not a winnable war."¹³³

From the very beginning, this was the attitude that guided Obama's approach to Afghanistan. Rather than planning for an extended conflict, he declared a timetable for America's withdrawal and turned to the surge to make the exit seem less like a defeat. A quick inflow of troops and then an equally quick pull-out. It was irresponsible, shortsighted and manipulative. It was exactly the approach that the Democrats had accused the Bush administration of following in Iraq.

The rapid insertion of tens of thousands of troops and their immediate withdrawal a year later ¹³⁴ was wrong and doomed to fail, but the political commentators of the left who had derided every move Bush made in Iraq were silent when it came to Obama. Bush and his team had been held personally accountable for not listening to the generals—a canard at best—but when Obama failed to listen to the generals and even dismissed them for petty reasons, he was hailed as bold and decisive.

Most disturbing of all were the military casualties Obama's policies piled up in Afghanistan, which took place against a backdrop of media silence. The sacrifices made by American troops in Iraq had been turned into political fodder during the Bush administration: the numbers of casualties analyzed in detail, the coffins photographed and featured on the front pages of the nation's press, the bodies exploited as an anti-war propaganda props. Now, American troops died without notice. In 2007, the year of Bush's Iraq surge, American casualties increased by less than a hundred dead, and by 2008 they were down to a third of what they had been in the previous year—while in that same

period Iraqi civilian fatalities were down to a quarter, providing a clear metric of success in lives saved and violence reduced. But in 2009, the year of Obama's surge in Afghanistan, casualties more than doubled. By 2010 they had risen to 499. In the third year, Obama's war dead were still more than twice the number they had been in Bush's last year in Afghanistan.¹³⁵

Though Obama oversaw the shortest period of the war in Afghanistan, more American soldiers died on his watch than on Bush's. More American soldiers died in Afghanistan in 2010 than were killed during the first year of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. More soldiers were wounded in 2010 alone than had been wounded all through the war in Afghanistan during the Bush administration.¹³⁶ When Ted Koppel read the names of 721 soldiers killed up to that point in the war in Iraq, it was treated as a heroic defiance of Bush's war. From 2009 to 2011, the 1,200 Americans who died in Afghanistan did not merit any similar attention. While Bush was in office, dead soldiers were a useful talking point. But under Obama they were only background noise.

During the Iraq War, Democrats charged that the Bush administration was not giving soldiers the support they needed, but when their president was in charge of the war his rules of engagement tied the hands of America's soldiers. With more available manpower, soldiers were used instead of airstrikes, which risked killing Afghan civilians and alienating the locals. General McChrystal, Obama's new commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), issued a tactical directive stating, "We will not win based on the number of Taliban we kill... We must avoid the trap of winning tactical victories—but suffering strategic defeats—by causing civilian casualties or excessive damage and thus alienating the people."¹³⁷ McChrystal admitted that this approach "entails risks to our troops," but said that pre-

venting Afghan casualties was more important. According to the directive, airstrikes against compounds were now virtually off-limits. Entries and searches could be done only with the consent of local authorities.

Under these guidelines, the Taliban could retreat into compounds knowing that they could not be bombed there, and U.S. forces had to either wait for them to come out, or withdraw, or go in and fight them in small, unfamiliar spaces with a risk of serious casualties.¹³⁸ Unable to use tactical airstrikes, American troops were forced to call in mock strikes by having jets pass low overhead, in the hopes that the Taliban fighters would decide that the no-airstrikes policy had been dropped and therefore would surrender. Democratic congressmen had complained that there wasn't enough body armor for American soldiers in Iraq. In Afghanistan, a Democratic administration took away their air support, leaving them unprotected in the face of a surging tide of Taliban attacks.

The rules of engagement slowed the advance of American forces, giving the Taliban more time to prepare and allowing them to attack and fall back. Human shields became a standard tactic for Taliban fighters, who responded to the American fear of causing civilian casualties by firing from behind women and children.¹³⁹ When pressed, the Taliban fled out of harm's way and waited for a chance to regroup.¹⁴⁰ Most of the advantages that American troops had possessed earlier, such as airpower and night raids, were neutralized by their own government and its chain of command. One platoon showed off a new regulation it had been given: "Patrol only in areas that you are reasonably certain that you will not have to defend yourselves with lethal force."¹⁴¹ As the firepower gap narrowed between the American military and the Taliban, so did the casualty count. In Operation

Strike of the Sword, fourteen Marines died along with several dozen Taliban. This time there was no clamor from congressional Democrats blaming the administration for their deaths.

Even though American soldiers were being sacrificed by the Obama administration to protect Afghan civilians, the civilian casualties continued to rise as well. The number of Afghan civilian casualties caused by American forces dropped between 2009 and 2011, but civilian casualties caused by the Taliban steadily increased in that same period of time. The deadliest year for Afghan civilians was 2009, when over 2,400 were killed, with the Taliban accounting for two-thirds of the total. While the proportion of casualties caused by U.S. forces fell 28 percent, the proportion caused by the Taliban increased by 40 percent, nullifying any benefit from American restraint.¹⁴² This trend fell into line with the increase in ISAF combat deaths, which rose from 295 to 520. By 2011, American and allied forces were responsible for only 14.2 percent of Afghan civilian deaths, while the Taliban were responsible for 79.8 percent of them.¹⁴³ The Taliban had demonstrated that their reach was growing and American restraint did not save civilian lives. Rather, it cost even more lives by empowering the Taliban, who were hard at work taking them.

These numbers were the cost of the restraint, which allowed the Taliban to rack up more kills against both American forces and Afghan civilians. At West Point, Obama had declared that the goal was to reverse the Taliban's momentum; instead, the momentum was solidly on the side of the Taliban. The Taliban were pushing forward and Kabul was burning. By 2009 there had been a 117 percent increase in successful IED attacks in Kabul.¹⁴⁴ Not only weren't the Taliban territories being pacified, but even the capital was under siege.

But unlike in Iraq, where Bush's surge was accused of failing even when it was succeeding, the cry that Obama's surge was failing never went up. Obama's surge had been a short-term political strategy, whose goal was not stability but a military exit from the country and a political victory at home. The Democrats had supported a war in Iraq to win an election, and then opposed the Iraq War to win an election. Now they had to declare victory in Afghanistan in order to win yet another election. After ten years of war, the Democrats wanted to run as the party that had ended all the wars. And that required maintaining the illusion that their policies in Afghanistan had succeeded.

In June 2011, Obama delivered a speech vowing that "these long wars will come to a responsible end."¹⁴⁵ The White House website put up a gloating "Mission Accomplished" infographic boasting of the end of the war in Iraq, the defeat of al-Qaeda and the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The centerpiece of the claim would be the killing of Osama bin Laden, which was paradoxically the result of intelligence gathered from the "waterboarding" that the Democrats had denounced as torture, and a secret military operation that Bush had authorized.¹⁴⁶ "Killed bin Laden" became the explanatory text—and the only one—for the assertion that al-Qaeda had been defeated.

Meanwhile, as American troops were completing their withdrawal from Iraq, al-Qaeda bombs were going off in Baghdad, and al-Qaeda forces were surging in Libya and Yemen.¹⁴⁷ It was the sort of moment that no left-wing journalist would have allowed to pass if it had occurred under Bush. But Obama was allowed to hang his "Mission Accomplished" infographics with no adverse comments from the watchdogs of the press.

Speaking for the Democrats from the platform of the Sen-

ate Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry declared that bin Laden's death was "a potentially game-changing opportunity to build momentum for a political solution in Afghanistan."¹⁴⁸ It was hard to see how this was so, considering that bin Laden had been killed in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Democrats who had once touted the war in Afghanistan as the real war on terror now insisted that a political solution was the only way forward. Taliban defections remained a trickle and there had been no turnaround similar to the defections of the Sunni alliance that had changed the security situation in Iraq.

Conclusion

The anti-war party had run a pledge to focus on defeating Al-Qaeda while repairing America's foreign policy, but once in power they blew two wars and began a third. Not only did they fail to improve America's international standing or to mend any fractured relationships, but they created new danger zones and empowered America's enemies. Nor were they held accountable for this.

Democrats who had screamed bloody murder when the Bush administration dropped al-Qaeda terrorists into Gitmo to await trial shrugged their shoulders when the Obama administration used drones to assassinate suspected al-Qaeda terrorists—and often their families—or suspected terrorists who were U.S. citizens. They shrugged them again when Obama dropped his call for a speedy withdrawal in Iraq and again when they began yet a third war in Libya.

Democrats had been for the war in Iraq before they were against it, and against unilateral wars before they were for them, they had doubled back on every issue, and still they wanted vot-

ers to believe that they were principled idealists. But their record exposed them as political opportunists whose only principle was self-interest and their only ideal that of expediency.

Democrats betrayed the sacrifices that Americans made in Iraq and turned a manageable situation into an unacknowledged defeat. The consistencies that Democrats displayed were their political calculations and their determination to avoid being held accountable for what they did.

When Democrats took the reins of power, Republicans remained stubbornly loyal to the idea of a united America on matters of national security. After voicing skepticism about Obama's Libyan war, prominent congressional Republicans were unwilling to vote for HR 2278, a resolution designed to limit funds for the war. When given the opportunity to take a stand, nearly 40 percent of congressional Republicans lacked the courage to oppose even an unpopular war begun without congressional consent.¹⁴⁹ While Democrats had done everything possible to undermine the Iraq War for partisan reasons, the Republicans were all too willing to prove their bipartisanship and loyalty at the expense of national security. In Afghanistan and Iraq, Republicans were not ready to abandon wars that America (and their Republican president) had engaged. So they went along and allowed the Obama administration to make a hash of Iraq and then Afghanistan. Unlike the Democrats on Iraq, Republicans were not driven by a need to create failure on the battlefield, but they failed to fight against the failures in Afghanistan the way Democrats had fought against the successes in Iraq.

In 2011, during the misnamed "Arab Spring," the Obama administration began dismantling regimes that had secured an uneasy stability in the Middle East. In the process, it encour-

aged the Islamofascists who were America's enemies. But there was little opposition (and indeed there was some support) from Republicans—Lindsay Graham and John McCain in particular. The return of the Carter administration had not brought out the Reagan in them.

Wars are won and lost on the home front. The soldier cannot win without leaders willing to stand behind his mission, and to fight for him as he fights for us. The Republicans were unprepared for the Democratic betrayal of the war in Iraq; they were not ready to hold the Democrats to account and condemn a posture that gave unprecedented aid and comfort to America's enemies, with untold consequences still waiting in the smoldering regions of the Middle East. The betrayal of American men and women on the field of battle, the betrayal of those who hoped for freedom and were left to fend for themselves, and finally the betrayal of their fellow citizens in the face of the threats confronting them are crimes compounded by the sacrifices of the dead, the broken hopes of the newly enslaved and the abandonments of the slain of September 11 whose children inherited a world where the terrorist threats continue to grow.

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