



## **GOP needs to stop being “stupid and proud of it” on Iraq**

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As Iraq descends into chaos, the Republican Party finds itself in a nearly impossible position.

The claim that the war was worth fighting is looking more absurd by the day. The assertion that George W. Bush’s surge put Iraq on the path to political reconciliation seems even less credible.

The memory of Iraq will be a drag on the party’s fortunes. The best it can hope for is that Americans are so focused on the Democrats’ unpopular domestic programs that they ignore the last GOP president’s disastrous foreign policy.

Hillary Clinton, the leading contender for the Democratic nomination in 2016, has once again positioned herself to wring advantage from the Iraq disaster. She, of course, voted in October 2002 to authorize the use of force against Iraq.

Being pro-war helped her then. She won praise from hawks who exulted in the bipartisan support for the war.

Two years later, her Iraq war vote likely cost her the Democratic nomination in 2008, but it didn’t exclude her from being named Secretary of State. From that exalted position, Clinton argued for sending tens of thousands of additional troops into Afghanistan, urged Obama to attack Libya, and supported a tough line toward Syria.

Once again, the hawks took note, and no doubt were pleased.

Now Clinton has expressed her regrets about Iraq. In her memoir, *Hard Choices*, Clinton admits her vote was a mistake.

“[M]any Senators came to wish they had voted against the resolution. I was one of them. As the war dragged on, with every letter I sent to a family in New York who had lost a

son or daughter, a father or mother, my mistake [became] more painful...I thought I had acted in good faith and made the best decision I could with the information I had...I still got it wrong," Clinton wrote.

It does no good to speculate as to whether or not Clinton's misgivings are sincere. The point is that she is on record as opposing the war, albeit after the fact.

If the hawks now cry foul, and turn their fire on her, they do her a favor: their hostility could help her secure the Democratic nomination, and, perhaps, the general election.

After all, consider how Clinton's position on Iraq stacks up against the leading crop of GOP presidential candidates. According to my math, she has a better than 70 percent chance of facing off against someone who still thinks the Iraq war was worth fighting. This at a time when 59 percent of Americans think that it wasn't.

Consider the top 10 contenders for the GOP nomination according to an April 2014 FoxNews poll. Only two — Paul Ryan and Rick Santorum — were in Congress in 2002. Both voted for the Iraq resolution, and neither has declared that he made a mistake.

Marco Rubio, who entered the Senate in 2011, has consistently sided with the most hawkish faction in that chamber, and, true to form, is calling for U.S. military action in Iraq right now. Jeb Bush has an unfortunate last name.

Rick Perry was busy being governor of Texas in 2002, and Ted Cruz was still a relative unknown, but neither has distanced himself from his fellow Texan's war. Perry proposed sending troops back into Iraq in 2012, and Ted Cruz scored points with hawks for his attack on Chuck Hagel. Among Hagel's sins? Opposing the Iraq war (after Hagel had voted for it).

Not quite a year ago, before the Bridgegate scandal broke, Chris Christie warned of the "dangerous" "strain of libertarianism" running in the GOP, by which he meant Rand Paul, the only serious Republican contender who has stated categorically that the Iraq war was a mistake.

Scott Walker and Bobby Jindal would probably rather not talk about foreign policy at all (and who can blame them?), but they eventually will be asked about Iraq if they run for president.

The public's approval of Barack Obama's foreign policy continues to decline, but it's obvious why the GOP's star isn't rising. Obama's unofficial mantra "don't do stupid [stuff]," so ripe for ridicule by the pro-war faction, looks preferable to the alternative: "we do stupid stuff, and we're proud of it!"

With that slogan, Republicans will have a hard time convincing the American people to trust them with the keys to the nation's foreign policy.

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