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## Obama's Win-Win on Iraq

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The end of the Iraq war is a rare win-win situation for President Obama. So far, he has played his hand skillfully. And it is a fair bet that he will continue to do so. Indeed, it might be one of the only policy areas that won't cost him votes come next year.

This week's events surrounding the end of the nearly nine-years long U.S. military mission in Mesopotamia reveal Obama's acumen and good fortune. On Monday, Obama and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Makiki punctuated the fact that the U.S. mission was finally ending. Today, the president will travel to Fort Bragg to thank the troops for their service in a war that he opposed at the outset.

There is irony in this, but one that Americans have managed for many years: unlike Vietnam, the American people have learned to love the troops while still hating the war. We don't blame the military for the fact that the war has turned out to be a bloody, costly quagmire. And with good reason: the military didn't claim that it would be easy or cheap. The soldiers knew better. With few exceptions, the cheerleaders for the war had no first-hand experience in warfare.

President Obama will likely emerge unscathed even if the worst-case scenarios transpire in Iraq. Unlike his worn-out claim that he inherited most of the country's economic problems, "the other guy did it" excuse rings true when it comes to Iraq. The [dwindling but vocal few](#) <sup>[3]</sup> who call for the U.S. military to remain in Iraq indefinitely cannot fairly accuse President Obama of implementing a reckless policy driven by the political calendar. He merely executed the plan according to the timeline developed by his predecessor.

Obama was not in a strong position to renegotiate the Status of Forces Agreement, given the Iraqi people's overwhelming opposition to a continued U.S. presence in their country. But it wasn't in his interest to do so. The American people want this war to end, and he wins credit, fairly or not, for following through on his promise to end it. And if Iraq descends into chaos, and civil war, or if Iran somehow manages to consolidate power over its restive neighbor, Obama can claim, justifiably, that these things wouldn't have happened had people listened to him in 2002. But he doesn't have to say it. Others will say it for him. Nearly every news story reporting on this week's events have reminded viewers, listeners, and readers that the president opposed this war. That one fact translates to a relatively favorable perception of the president's handling of foreign policy, generally.

Indeed, the president likely wins whenever the subject of Iraq arises. Excepting Ron Paul and Gary Johnson, the other GOP contenders are unable or unwilling to speak to the nearly two-thirds of Americans who believe the war to have been a mistake. Most of the president's Republican challengers are reluctant to cross the neoconservative cheerleaders for the war who, inexplicably, still have great sway over aspiring chief executives. On the crucial question, "Was the war worth it?" Iraq war true believers expect a simple, one word answer: yes. They will not tolerate any apostasy, even though, [for most Americans, the answer is a resounding no](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Any of his Republican challengers who cannot give that same answer can only hope that they won't be asked the question. The more they say about Iraq, the less credible they become. And Barack Obama doesn't have to say a thing.

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