

Hello Everyone,

This is another message from me in an occasional series....

Barack's positions on Pakistan, despots, and nuclear weapons have made headlines recently, leading some to question his experience in – and therefore judgment on – foreign affairs. For what it's worth, I want to tell you why I have great confidence in Barack's judgment in this area.

Judgment

Let's start from the beginning – on the most important issue we now face – the Iraq War.

Long before he announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate – when he was a State Senator in Illinois and supposedly inexperienced in foreign affairs – Barack declared his opposition to invading Iraq. In a speech delivered in Chicago on October 26, 2002 – nearly six months before we invaded – he declared, “I don't oppose all wars... I'm opposed to ... a dumb war.” This is a speech he conceived and wrote himself – long before he had a fleet of advisors and speechwriters. It is a true measure of this man's judgment – and eloquence. I urge you to read this speech – it's attached, and it's only two pages. (The full text also appears below.)

On November 15, 2002, Barack was interviewed on TV about that speech (it is posted on YouTube.com: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhpKmQCCwB8>). In it, with uncanny sophistication and prescience, he asks, “...What's our long term commitment there? How much is it going to cost? What does it mean for us to rebuild Iraq? How do we stabilize and make sure that this country doesn't splinter into factions between the Shiites and the Kurds and the Sunnis?”

As Barack has more recently pointed out, we tend to expect that experience will enhance judgment, since it is judgment we ultimately seek. But, as we have seen with an administration dominated by Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld – who both served in the Nixon Administration over 30 years ago – experience is not always a proxy for good judgment. And, as Barack has demonstrated with his early and nuanced warnings about Iraq, good judgment does not always require years of Washington experience.

Experience

I don't understand why it is presumed that the two other leading Democratic contenders have more experience than Barack does. Here are the facts – in terms of years served in elective office by January 2009:

Obama: 4 years U.S. Senate
 8 years IL Senate
 12 years in elective office

Clinton: 8 years U.S. Senate

Edwards: 6 years U.S. Senate

Incidentally, another prominent political leader from Illinois had served in elective office for a relatively short time prior to his election as president and was defeated in his only bid for a U.S. Senate seat.

Lincoln: 8 years IL General Assembly (the lower house)
 2 years U.S. House of Representatives
 10 years in elective office

Advisers

It is important to note that Barack's principal advisers on foreign affairs are highly experienced:

Tony Lake – National Security Adviser to President Clinton. Also worked in the State Department and in National Security positions for Presidents Nixon and Kennedy.

Susan Rice – Member of President Clinton's National Security Council and an Assistant Secretary of State.

Nonetheless, as he has demonstrated since 2002, Barack will not simply embrace traditional Washington approaches to foreign policy. He will be his own man and will try to do what makes sense.

Observers and Competitors

The Senator's judgment on foreign affairs has recently elicited the following praise from some respected observers:

Ted Sorenson – John Kennedy's long-time Senate and White House adviser. Obama "...represents the future of the Democratic Party... (because he does not use) the same old Cold War rhetoric...."

Zbigniew Brzezinski – President Carter's National Security Adviser. "...There is a need for a fundamental rethinking of how we conduct world affairs ...Obama seems to me to have both the guts and the intelligence to address that issue and to change the nature of American's relationship with the world. He has a sense of what is historically relevant and what is needed from the United States in relationship to the world."

Lee Hamilton – Co-Chair of the Iraq Study Group. "Senator Obama presented a thoughtful, substantive and comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy."

Specifically with respect to dealing with despots, Senator Clinton said the following on April 22, 2007 in Decorah, Iowa, "I think it is a terrible mistake for our president to say he will not talk with bad people. You don't make peace with your friends – you have to do the hard work of dealing with people you don't agree with." Naïve?

Pakistan

Lastly, remember when Barack said he would pursue terrorists in Pakistan, with or without the permission of its military dictator? And, remember how the establishment lambasted him for that? Well, as reported by the Associated Press on August 24, 2007, the U.S. military has had the authority to do just that for more than three years under its "rules of engagement."

So, I hope you see why I think Barack's judgment on foreign affairs has been very good. And even though his experience in holding elective office is actually more extensive than his two leading competitors, it is his good judgment that I most value.

Please "pass it on."

Chuck

Barack Obama's Iraq Speech

Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances.

The [Civil War](#) was one of the bloodiest in history, and yet it was only through the crucible of the sword, the sacrifice of multitudes, that we could begin to perfect this union, and drive the scourge of slavery from our soil.

I don't oppose all wars.

My grandfather signed up for a war the day after [Pearl Harbor was bombed](#), fought in Patton's army. He saw the dead and dying across the fields of Europe; he heard the stories of fellow troops who first entered Auschwitz and Treblinka. He fought in the name of a larger freedom, part of that arsenal of democracy that triumphed over evil, and he did not fight in vain.

I don't oppose all wars.

After [September 11th](#), after witnessing the carnage and destruction, the dust and the tears, I supported this Administration's pledge to hunt down and root out those who would slaughter innocents in the name of intolerance, and I would willingly take up arms myself to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

I don't oppose all wars. And I know that in this crowd today, there is no shortage of patriots, or of patriotism. What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war. What I am opposed to is the cynical attempt by [Richard Perle](#) and [Paul Wolfowitz](#) and other arm-chair, weekend warriors in this Administration to shove their own ideological agendas down our throats, irrespective of the costs in lives lost and in hardships borne.

What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like [Karl Rove](#) to distract us from a rise in the uninsured, a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income – to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone through the worst month since the Great Depression.

That's what I'm opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war. A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics.

Now let me be clear – I suffer no illusions about [Saddam Hussein](#). He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power. He has repeatedly defied [UN resolutions](#), thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, and coveted nuclear capacity.

He's a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him.

But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to his neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that in concert with the international community he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history.

I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaeda.

I am not opposed to all wars. I'm opposed to dumb wars.

So for those of us who seek a more just and secure world for our children, let us send a clear message to the president today. You want a fight, [President Bush](#)? Let's finish the fight with Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, through effective, coordinated intelligence, and a shutting down of the financial networks that support terrorism, and a homeland security program that involves more than color-coded warnings.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure that the UN inspectors can do their work, and that we vigorously enforce a non-proliferation treaty, and that former enemies and current allies like Russia safeguard and ultimately eliminate their stores of nuclear material, and that nations like Pakistan and India never use the terrible weapons already in their possession, and that the arms merchants in our own country stop feeding the countless wars that rage across the globe.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East, the Saudis and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their own people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corruption and inequality, and mismanaging their economies so that their youth grow up without education, without prospects, without hope, the ready recruits of terrorist cells.

You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to wean ourselves off Middle East oil, through an energy policy that doesn't simply serve the interests of Exxon and Mobil.

Those are the battles that we need to fight. Those are the battles that we willingly join. The battles against ignorance and intolerance. Corruption and greed. Poverty and despair.

The consequences of war are dire, the sacrifices immeasurable. We may have occasion in our lifetime to once again rise up in defense of our freedom, and pay the wages of war. But we ought not – we will not – travel down that hellish path blindly. Nor should we allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain.