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Why Bush Is A Loser

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By David Corn

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Who knew Bill Kristol had such a flair for satire?

How else to read [his piece](#) for Outlook on Sunday, in which he declared, "[George W. Bush](#)'s presidency will probably be a successful one"? Surely Kristol, the No. 1 cheerleader for the [Iraq](#) war, was mocking himself (and his neoconservative pals) for having been so mistaken about so much. But just in case his article was meant to be a serious stab at commentary, let's review Kristol's record as a prognosticator.

On Sept. 18, 2002, he declared that a war in Iraq "could have terrifically good effects throughout the [Middle East](#)." A day later, he said [Saddam Hussein](#) was "past the finish line" in developing nuclear weapons. On Feb. 20, 2003, he said of Saddam: "He's got weapons of mass destruction.... Look, if we free the people of Iraq we will be respected in the Arab world." On March 1, 2003 -- 18 days before the invasion of Iraq -- Kristol dismissed the possibility of sectarian conflict afterward. He also said, "Very few wars in American history were prepared better or more thoroughly than this one by this president." He maintained that the war would cost \$100 billion to \$200 billion. (The running tab is now about half a trillion dollars.) On March 5, 2003, Kristol said, "We'll be vindicated when we discover the weapons of mass destruction."

After a performance like this -- and the above is only a partial review; for more details, [click here](#) -- Kristol, a likeable fellow, ought to have his pundit's license yanked. But he's back again with a sequel: W. will be seen as a wonderful president. His latest efforts should be laughed off op-ed pages. But in the commentariat, he's still taken seriously. So assuming the joke is indeed unintended, I'll examine Kristol's most recent fantasy as if it's real.

Iraq: Kristol says "we now seem to be on course to a successful outcome." The war has been a mess from the start, and these days even leading Republican senators no longer buy the argument that Bush's so-called "surge" is succeeding or can succeed as promised. Kristol contends that with the recent escalation "we are increasingly able to protect more of the Iraqi population." Many in Iraq would find little comfort in his assurances. Despite the "surge," Iraqi civilian deaths are still running at 2,500 to 3,000 a month. And since the "surge" began, according to [the Pentagon](#)'s own numbers, the number of attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces and Iraqi civilians has marginally increased.

Still, Kristol advises, stick with the "surge," train more Iraqi troops, and all will be well. The United States has already spent \$19 billion training 346,500 or so Iraqi troops and police officers, and now merely six battalions -- down from 10, according to Gen. [Peter Pace](#) -- can function independently. That is, only 3,000 Iraqi troops are operating on their own after all this time and money.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government is making little, if any, progress on key political matters that must be resolved, and the parliament is taking off August -- while American GIs continue to fight and die. What are they dying for? Kristol and Bush argue the war is a vital part of the battle against [al Qaeda](#) and international jihadism, and Kristol claims the [U.S. military](#) is "routing [al Qaeda in Iraq](#)." But, as the Los Angeles Times [recently reported](#), of the 19,000 insurgents held by the U.S. military in Iraq, only 135 are foreigners. The United States is not fighting al Qaeda in Iraq; it's fighting Iraqis. Kristol is whistling past a graveyard -- filled with the bodies of thousands of American soldiers and probably hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians -- when he insists the United States is heading toward a "messy" victory.

And Kristol keeps arguing the past. The problems that have arisen in Iraq since the invasion, he maintains, have to be judged against what would have occurred had there been no invasion: a

nuclear-armed Saddam conspiring with al Qaeda. To justify the war, Kristol is pushing the myth (debunked by U.S. intelligence) that Saddam was in cahoots with [Osama bin Laden](#), and he's ignoring the fact that WMD inspectors were present in Iraq right before the invasion and (as we now know) doing a good job in determining Saddam had no unconventional weapons or nuclear bomb program. Such a policy could have been maintained.

Afghanistan: Steady as she goes, says Kristol. Well, not if you're one of those dozens of civilians who seem to be killed every few days in an errant attack from [NATO](#) and western forces. (Even Afghanistan President [Hamid Karzai](#) is fed up.) And shouldn't this war have been over years ago? Reconstruction is at a crawl [The Taliban](#) is resurgent. Opium production is setting new records. And the Bush administration (last time I checked) had no high-level official solely responsible for Afghanistan policy. Afghanistan has been a job neglected and unfinished.

Terrorism: Yes -- thankfully -- there have been no attacks here since 9/11. But recent intelligence reports say that al Qaeda (the real al Qaeda, not al Qaeda in Iraq) is becoming stronger. The man responsible for the worst act of terrorism ever visited upon the United States remains free. And the Bush administration's excesses in combating terrorism -- [Guantanamo](#), warrantless wiretapping of Americans, and more -- have undermined the cause at home and abroad.

Foreign policy: Kristol does not mention that, thanks to Bush's misadventure in Iraq and other missteps, the United States' image abroad is in the sub-basement. He does note that we now have decent relations with [Brazil](#). But he forgets about the worsening conflict between [Israel](#) and the Palestinians (and the other Palestinians) -- a conflict arguably exacerbated by Bush administration blunders.

The economy: All is fine, Kristol claims, pointing to conventional indicators and hailing Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy. But most Americans tell pollsters the country is not on the right track. Are they stupid? No, they are coping with various forms of insecurity and stress that Kristol does not recognize. Since 2000, the median income of working-age household has fallen each year. The economy has been growing, corporate profits are up, and the stock market is on the rise, but this recovery has handed working Americans weak growth in wages and salaries. The share of national income going to salaries and wages is at the lowest level since such stats were first compiled in 1929.

Moreover, the high costs of health care and education also worry many Americans. Kristol praises Bush's Medicare drug plan -- which routinely is assailed by critics on the left and right -- but Bush has done nothing to make health care more affordable and more available for most Americans. Forty-five million or so Americans remain uninsured. And while Kristol cheers globalization -- which is causing employment instability for Americans -- we can celebrate by eating tainted shrimp from [China](#).

The Supreme Court: In Kristol's world, Chief Justice [John G. Roberts Jr.](#) and Justice [Samuel A. Alito Jr.](#), Bush's contributions to the court, are titans of jurisprudence respected throughout the land. Yet the Roberts court's recent decisions have sparked (justifiably) much controversy and rancor. In two separate decisions, Roberts protected corporate speech but trampled on the free speech rights of students. Roberts was also slammed by Justice [Antonin Scalia](#) for not having the guts to admit he was overturning precedent when he was. Bush's Supreme Court has become another battlefield in the partisan wars--not a symbol of accomplishment.

It's remarkable what Kristol leaves out of his bizarro-world view of Bush the Great: Hurricane Katrina, the collapse of the [Justice Department](#), global warming, and much else. An American city was practically destroyed on Bush's watch, but that merits no consideration in Kristol's case for Bush. The Justice Department -- run by Bush cronies accused of corruption, incompetence, or both -- is in tatters. (A former department official tells me the administration is having a hard time finding people willing to fill the vacancies at the top.) And though Bush begrudgingly conceded that global warming is underway and human-induced, he has taken no significant steps to redress this pressing problem. If one wants to peer into the future, it could well be that Bush will be judged a failure more for his inaction on global warming than for his action in Iraq. Vetoing stem cell research legislation, commuting [Scooter Libby's](#)

prison sentence, rewriting clean air rules to benefit industry, pushing tax breaks for oil companies, suppressing the work of scientists, enhancing government secrecy -- Bush has repeatedly placed parochial interests over the public interest.

The Bush-Cheney years have been marked by ineptitude, miscalculation, and scandal. A successful presidency? Bush will be lucky if he gets a public elementary school in his adopted hometown of Crawford, Tex., named after him. He has placed this country in a hole. Yet Kristol, with shovel in hand, points to that hole and says, Trust me -- we're about to strike oil!

If it's true that history repeats first as tragedy and then as farce, Kristol has short-circuited the process and gone straight to parody. His Bush boosterism -- an act of self-justification -- would be amusing were it not for all the damage he has helped Bush to cause.

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