

[Give Credit Where Credit is Due](#)

President Bush and U.S. troops persevered while others sniped  
By Rep. Mike Pence



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As the combat mission in Iraq draws to a close for the United States and the president prepares

to address the nation tonight, the Obama administration is attempting to rewrite history by taking singular credit for our accomplishments in Iraq. Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. recently claimed it was President Obama who laid out the plan for a responsible end of the war in Iraq. But that's not the whole story.

As we mark this milestone, let us remember the real history of Operation Iraqi Freedom and give credit where credit is due - to the American service members, their families and a commander in chief who would not accept defeat in the face of withering criticism at home and abroad.

Seeing U.S. combat forces leaving with success is chiefly the result of the professionalism and sacrifices of our military in executing the surge and the Status of Forces Agreement implemented before Mr. Obama set foot in the Oval Office.

First, our brave men and women in uniform deserve our nation's deepest gratitude. With great valor, they manned the front lines of the war on terror and achieved a stable and successful conclusion to our combat operations in Iraq. We commemorate the more than 4,000 American troops who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. Their names will forever be enshrined on the hearts of the people of two grateful nations. For their families, the war in Iraq will never end, and we pray that God comforts them with the knowledge that the sacrifice they endured was not in vain.

We also commend the many more who suffered life-altering injuries in the course of their courageous service. All of the men and women who served under the American flag in Operation Iraqi Freedom have made us safer, and they have made us proud.

Our troops went to Iraq as part of a strong multinational force that executed one of the swiftest military advances in history. In a remarkably short time, they liberated the Iraqi people from a brutal dictatorship, and the world watched the celebrations in Baghdad.

Those early accomplishments did not bring a swift end to the conflict in Iraq. Vicious terror and military attacks continued against our troops and innocent civilians. But President George W. Bush recognized the long-term danger of abandoning an unstable Iraq, although many of his political opponents here at home did not. While Republican leaders like Rep. John A. Boehner

were saying "victory is the only option," leading voices in the Democratic Party took a starkly different approach.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said that "this war is lost," and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi asserted, "This is not the way to go. It has failed." Both advocated a premature withdrawal and timetables that would have ensured defeat and consigned the Iraqi nation to a future in the hands of radical insurgents.

Early in 2007, amid growing violence in Iraq, Mr. Bush acted on the advice of commanders on the ground and embraced a new strategy that came to be known as the "surge." When I met with Mr. Bush days before he announced the strategy, he told me and a handful of other congressional leaders that he had "decided not to lose." He told us he was implementing a new strategy on the ground with new commanders and was determined to give victory one more chance.

Despite public opposition and criticism in the press, Republicans in Congress stood with our soldiers, again and again, supporting the surge and providing the resources they needed to complete the mission.

House Democrats voted 11 times to implement artificial timetables and tried repeatedly to impose unrealistic conditions on military funding that would have amounted to cutting the funds to our troops in Iraq. They were ready to forsake the fledgling security efforts of Iraq's own forces and abandon an infant democracy to the embrace of brutal terrorists.

As senators, Barack Obama and Joe Biden were among the voices calling for a premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. To make their point, Mr. Obama and Mr. Biden even voted to deny necessary funding for our troops. They also voted 10 times to impose a dangerous timetable for withdrawal that only would have increased the resolve of our enemies.

It also is important that history record that then-Sen. Obama opposed the surge strategy as soon as it was announced. He claimed that instead of reducing violence, the surge would make things worse and no amount of additional troops on the ground would "make a substantial difference." After Mr. Bush's 2007 State of the Union speech, Mr. Obama told an interviewer, "I don't think the president's strategy is going to work."

Despite the fact that it was obvious by late 2007 that violence in Iraq was declining, Mr. Obama and other leaders of his party refused to recognize the progress. In November 2007, Mr. Obama argued that the United States had "not seen improvements, but we're actually worsening, potentially, a situation there."

The simple fact is that Mr. Reid, Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Obama were wrong about the surge and wrong to oppose it.

This administration didn't even set in motion the agreement leading to today's withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq. Before Mr. Bush left office, his administration negotiated a Status of Forces Agreement that was approved by the government of Iraq in December 2008. This agreement set in motion the drawdown of American troops from combat operations in Iraq. On Jan. 1, 2009, before Mr. Obama took office, the United States gave control of the Green Zone and Saddam Hussein's presidential palace to the Iraqi government.

Today, Iraq is experiencing a higher level of stability and security, but our mission there is far from over as our military shifts to an advise-and-assist role. Thousands of American soldiers will remain in Iraq and will need the continued support of this administration and Congress as they assist the Iraqi people in achieving lasting security.

I am grateful for the support the Obama administration has shown our troops in Iraq, but its long-standing opposition to our military's successful surge strategy must not be forgotten in the midst of this widening American success. The truth is, this successful transition is due to the brave service of our troops and a commander in chief who supported the military's strategy in the face of intense domestic opposition.

As the president addresses the nation tonight, let's hope he gives credit where credit is due: to the men and women of the U.S. armed forces who wrought stability from tyranny and terrorism in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and, for once, let's hope the president gives credit to a predecessor who refused to accept defeat.

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