



Strategic Failure: How President Obama's Drone Warfare, Defense Cuts, and Military Amateurism Have Imperiled America

By Mark Moyar

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In this stunningly detailed account of US military power in the Obama era, Mark Moyar reveals how Obama's military decisions have led to the international catastrophes of his second term. While our current downward spiral did not grab the attention of the American people until 2014, Moyar finds its roots in Obama's first-term decisions to shrink the US military and replace large overseas military commitments with "light footprints."

Obama's preoccupation with his political self-interest has consistently trumped the national interest. Moyar documents how Obama has failed to deliver on his substitutes for military power. Cutting through the chaff of partisan bickering with penetrating analysis, he homes in on the events and personalities driving failures across the globe.

Moyar illustrates how Obama's policies led to the rise of ISIS, and how conditions are primed for future cataclysms. He shows how the killing of the US ambassador at Benghazi was the result of a light-footprint approach in Libya, and reveals the problems stemming from our reliance on drone strikes. The ongoing military drawdown and international perceptions of Obama's passivity have heightened the risks to America from her enemies.

Drawing upon the lessons of Obama's presidency, Moyar concludes by identifying a better way for US national security in the twenty-first century. *Strategic Failure* is a timely and fascinating opening salvo in the looming 2016 showdown between Republican and Democratic presidential contenders.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The market for book-length critiques of Mr. Obama's foreign policy is saturated, but Mr. Moyar's effort is distinguished by his measured tone, analytic sobriety and scholarly approach....[Mark Moyar] is one of our ablest strategic thinkers, and he has a gift for letting the facts speak for themselves—or rather, drop like hammer blows." (The Wall Street Journal)

"Thankfully for the current Republican presidential candidates...Mark Moyar's new book provides a compendium of the national-security facts and a rational, if pointed, analysis of how those facts add up to a picture of American strategic decline...Moyar has a blueprint for them, if they want it." (National Review)

"*Strategic Failure* is an extraordinary read for anyone who cares about the future of the United States of America. It depicts a near complete free fall of President Obama, who failed to rally the American people to win during a period of world history that may go down as one of the most complex, chaotic times in the last fifty years. *Strategic Failure* explains how and why it all has come to pass." (Lieutenant General Michael T. Flynn, USA (Ret.), former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency)

"*Strategic Failure* is an iron-clad indictment of the Obama national security policy. This book will serve as an invaluable resource for future generations of public servants, national security enthusiasts and concerned Americans." (Pete Hegseth, CEO of Concerned Veterans for America and FOX News contributor)

About the Author

Mark Moyar, a distinguished historian and expert on US national security, has served as a consultant to the senior leadership of US Special Operations Command, US Central Command, and the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. His previous books include *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* and *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965*. Visit MarkMoyar.com.

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Strategic Failure

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A MAN OF CHANGE

Hand in hand, the President and First Lady strode toward the center of Hradčany Square through a cloud of rapturous applause that overwhelmed the Czech symphony wafting from the loudspeakers. Youth predominated among the crowd, and Americans among the youth, to the dismay of a blogger from the Economist who had shown up to ask Czechs their opinions of the new American president. The official cameras had been positioned to capture Prague's medieval castle in the background, adding Old World gravitas to the excitement generated by the New World couple.

Barack and Michelle Obama circled the podium for sixty seconds, their faces beaming with the joy of people who had been in the White House for only a few months. As the First Lady took her seat, the President's

mouth opened into a wide grin that revealed two rows of large, gleaming, and perfectly white teeth. With the rectangular gray boards of his trademark teleprompters on his flanks like oversized rearview mirrors, Obama thanked the crowd and launched into the usual pleasantries.

Obama had come to Prague to deliver his first speech on nuclear weapons, a subject that had long been dear to him. During the presidential race against Senator John McCain, Obama had convinced quite a few people of high reputation that he was a foreign policy realist, cognizant that interests and force ruled international affairs. Yet he aimed the opening salvos of his Prague speech at the views of realists, including the view that nuclear weapons had become a permanent fixture on the global landscape, and the view that nuclear deterrence preserved peace. “If we believe that the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable,” Obama said, “then in some way we are admitting to ourselves that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable.”

Peace, Obama continued, could be achieved not through military strength, but through international cooperation on disarmament. “When we fail to pursue peace, then it stays forever beyond our grasp,” Obama intoned. “We know the path when we choose fear over hope. To denounce or shrug off a call for cooperation is an easy but also a cowardly thing to do. That’s how wars begin. That’s where human progress ends.”

Peace-minded people needed to come together to drown out the siren songs of those counseling war. “I know that a call to arms can stir the souls of men and women more than a call to lay them down. But that is why the voices for peace and progress must be raised together.”

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Among journalists, bloggers, talk show hosts, and other political junkies, Obama’s Prague speech rekindled interest in an article he had written in college, twenty-six years earlier, on student opposition to nuclear weapons and the military. Near the end of his senior year at Columbia, Obama had decided to write about student activism for the campus publication Sundial. At the time, left-wing political activists were struggling to stay above water at America’s universities, including Ivy League schools like Columbia where they had flourished in years past. The United States was in a conservative mood, having recoiled at the radical excesses of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which had been centered on university campuses. With the end of the draft and the Vietnam War, student organizers had been deprived of issues that could easily rouse the passions of their classmates, whether they be passions of idealism or self-preservation.

In comparison with their predecessors of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Ivy League students of 1983 were more focused on traditional college activities. They were far more likely to go to class, drink beer, or frolic with members of the opposite sex than to attend political rallies or drive to Washington to picket members of Congress. Among the politically minded, of whom there still existed a considerable number, some had figured out that more could be gained by advancing within the once-despised “system,” by getting good grades and good jobs, than by shouting slogans on the sidewalk.

Disconcerting quietude could be found even at Columbia, which had been rattled by some of the fiercest of the protests against the Vietnam War. Fifteen years earlier, student radicals had occupied five university buildings in opposition to a university administration that they considered to be too supportive of the U.S. government and its war in Vietnam. They held on to the buildings for a week, sustaining themselves on fried chicken that their supporters tossed into the windows. It took an army of New York City policemen wielding clubs and tear gas to evict them.

In March 1983, the student body was “tame if not apathetic,” in the words of Obama biographer David Maraniss.¹ Obama went to interview campus organizers at Earl Hall, once the bustling nerve center of the

1968 student protests, which was now a sorry shell of its former self, like a California mining town fifteen years after the Gold Rush. The two campus organizations that young Obama was covering in his article, Arms Race Alternatives and Students Against Militarism, were both struggling to attract members beyond the single digits. Rob Kahn, a member of Students Against Militarism whom Obama would quote in his article, remembered thinking at the time, “This is a group of fifteen people that meets once a week and doesn’t do much.” In his view, the earnest student journalist with the unusual name took the group more seriously than it deserved.²

“By organizing and educating the Columbia community,” Obama wrote in his Sundial article, the campus activists were laying “the foundation for future mobilization against the relentless, often silent spread of militarism in the country.” He observed that “by adding their energy and effort in order to enhance the possibility of a decent world, they may help deprive us of a spectacular experience—that of war. But then, there are some things we shouldn’t have to live through in order to want to avoid the experience.”

Obama’s only reservation about the two campus groups was that they did not go far enough. By concentrating on freezing nuclear weapons, the members of Arms Race Alternatives were not tackling the larger problem of the military itself. “The narrow focus of the Freeze movement, as well as academic discussion of first versus second strike capabilities, suit the military-industrial interests, as they continue adding to their billion-dollar erector sets,” Obama lamented. One of the leaders of Arms Race Alternatives, Mark Bigelow, told Obama that the “narrow focus” on nuclear arms control reflected a recognition that abolishing the military entirely was excessively ambitious for the time being. “We do focus primarily on catastrophic weapons,” Bigelow explained. “Look, we say, here’s the worst part, let’s work on that. You’re not going to get rid of the military in the near future, so let’s at least work on this.”

As is customary for articles in college publications, Obama’s Sundial reportage disappeared soon after it was published. It evaded journalists and opposition researchers during the 2008 election, before mysteriously showing up on the Internet in January 2009. As soon as it came to light, Republicans pounced on its contents as evidence of Obama’s misguided views on national security. Obama’s own aides did not dismiss the article as the high-minded musings of an immature college student, as might have been expected, but instead described the opinions expressed therein as “deeply felt and lasting,” according to author James Mann.³

It would be the only early marker of Obama’s views on war and the military. Although numerous books have been written about Barack Obama already, including Obama’s two pre-presidential memoirs, the evidence on his views of the military between 1983 and 2001 is surprisingly thin. Obama chose to keep quiet on the subject, at least outside of conversations with friends and family. For nearly twenty years, Obama wrote nothing about national security and said nothing that was recorded by others.

His resurfacing came in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks, when he decided to pen an op-ed on the cataclysm in the Hyde Park Herald. A small community newspaper, the Herald served a few affluent neighborhoods in the otherwise poverty-stricken south side of Chicago, where Obama was then living as an Illinois state senator. For the Obama of 2001, the devastation of 9/11 did not provoke anger at the terrorists, as it did for so many other Americans. The attack was most significant to him because of what it said about global poverty and America’s neglect of it. Terrorism, wrote State Senator Obama, “grows from a climate of poverty and ignorance, helplessness and despair.” America needed “to devote far more attention to the monumental task of raising the hopes and prospects of embittered children across the globe—children not just in the Middle East, but also in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and within our own shores.”⁴

Over the course of the next year, Obama’s position on terrorism underwent a dramatic shift. When he

appeared at an antiwar rally at Chicago's Federal Plaza on October 2, 2002, Obama began by saying, "After September 11, 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 tragedy from happening again." Speaking against the backdrop of a fifty-three-foot pink flamingo sculpted by Alexander Calder, Obama told the crowd, "I don't oppose all wars. 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 armchair, 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."⁵

Obama never said why he shifted from decrying 9/11 as proof of America's neglect of global poverty to invoking 9/11 as the cause of a personal desire to take up arms against the perpetrators, in accord with the strategy of the George W. Bush administration. One might surmise that his mind was changed by the discovery that the 9/11 hijackers were neither poor nor ignorant, and were instead uncompromising ideologues who could be stopped only by force. Yet other passages in his speech at the Federal Plaza indicate that he had not abandoned his belief that poverty and ignorance accounted for terrorism. "You want a fight, President Bush?" Obama jeered. "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."

The most plausible reason for Obama's change in position between 2001 and 2002 was a political calculation that it would boost his chances of winning a higher office. In the spring of 2002, Obama had begun exploring the possibility of a run for the U.S. Senate in 2004, and in August 2002 he had brought on a high-powered political consultant by the name of David Axelrod. Raised in Manhattan, Axelrod had studied the political craft while on the staff of the Chicago Tribune and then had started his consultancy, Axelrod and Associates, in 1985. By 2002, Axelrod's list of successful clients included the mayors of many of America's major cities. As the Economist observed, one of Axelrod's specialties was "packaging black candidates for white voters." Axelrod believed that "the candidate is the message," and "the important thing is to tell a positive story about the candidate rather than to muddy the narrative with lots of talk about policy details."⁶

Axelrod presumably explained to his new client that anyone unwilling to offer some tough talk on terrorism would be incapable of obtaining the votes required for national office. The American voting public had no appetite for left-wing theories that blamed American inattention to poverty for suicide airplane attacks that killed thousands of Americans. Supporting America's intervention in Afghanistan would violate some of Obama's long-held principles, but if Obama were unwilling to abandon principles for the sake of gaining votes, he would have to join the countless others whose commitment to principles ensured that they would never win election to high office. As Axelrod must have told Obama, politicians can employ many rhetorical means to justify a major shift on an issue so that they do not appear to be unprincipled and instead come across even more favorably. The candidate could be said to have displayed open-mindedness by "reconsidering the issue in light of new developments." The candidate would be a "pragmatist who dealt with each situation on its own merits" rather than "employing simplistic, cookie-cutter solutions."

The new Obama messaging strategy on national security would prove to be a winning one. In the coming years, Obama raked in political points with liberals by pointing out that he had opposed the Iraq War when other leading Democrats had backed it, and at the same time he avoided accusations of weakness on national

security by espousing support for the American cause in Afghanistan, which was more popular than Iraq since Afghanistan had sheltered the masterminds of the 9/11 attacks. This national security narrative would be critical in Obama's race for the presidency in 2008.

During his first years in the U.S. Senate, Obama devoted little of his time to national security affairs and had little to say about events overseas, which would give political opponents few opportunities later to fault him for taking the wrong position on specific issues. He became chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs in early 2007, but by then he was making a run for the White House, which he used as an excuse to neglect the committee work. During his tenure as chair of the subcommittee, he did not hold a single policy hearing, a fact that rival Hillary Clinton would repeatedly point out in the Democratic primary.

With the start of presidential campaigning, though, Obama had no choice but to start talking about national security. In keeping with Axelrod's messaging doctrine, he provided few policy details and instead concentrated on the story of his support for the "good war" in Afghanistan and his opposition to the "dumb war" in Iraq, employing the latter to bash George W. Bush and distinguish himself from Democratic contenders who had voted in favor of the Iraq War. He vowed to send additional U.S. forces to Afghanistan. As both Obama's admirers and detractors agree, Obama's hawkish position on Afghanistan was driven by a desire to show swing voters that he could be tough on national security, not by a strong conviction about the strategic importance of Afghanistan or dissatisfaction with the current U.S. approach in that country.⁷

While Obama's other foreign policy proposals were few in number, they did foretell some of the major changes Obama was to implement. Candidate Obama vowed to take unilateral action against high-level terrorists in Pakistan if the Pakistani government did not act. He promised to double spending on foreign aid for development and governance in order to reduce poverty and "roll back the tide of hopelessness that gives rise to hate."⁸

Although the strategy of repeating his Afghanistan-and-Iraq narrative limited Obama's risk exposure, even so simple a strategy was destined to trip up a candidate whose inexperience left him ill-prepared to address sensitive political and military issues. On February 11, 2007, the day he announced his candidacy for the presidency, Obama went out of his way to slam the Iraq War, which at that time was considered a lost cause by many Democrats. At a campaign rally on the campus of Iowa State University, Obama declared, "We ended up launching a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged—and to which we now have spent \$400 billion and have seen over 3,000 lives of the bravest young Americans wasted."

Had the media given the remark more attention, Obama's diminution of the sacrifices of American troops might have sunk his campaign before it left the harbor. Fortunately for Obama, however, most of the major news outlets were starstruck by the young senator, and this statement received little coverage. It was a pattern that would recur during the campaign, appalling not only Republicans who watched the press ignore Democratic foibles in every presidential race, but also Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton and her husband, Bill.

Still, the reference to the "wasting" of 3,000 lives forced the Obama campaign team into damage-control mode, not where it wanted to be on the first day of the race. During an interview with the Des Moines Register, Obama recanted. "Their sacrifices are never wasted; that was sort of a slip of the tongue as I was speaking," he said. "What I meant to say was those sacrifices have not been honored by the same attention to strategy, diplomacy and honesty on the part of civilian leadership."⁹

It would be but the first of a series of incidents in which candidate Obama's words or deeds offended the men and women in uniform. Sheer ignorance accounted at least partially for the gaffes. As someone who knew almost nothing about the military or war, Obama had a tendency to say things that did not appear especially awful to individuals of his social background and ideological persuasion, but that came across as grossly insulting to members of the armed forces.

At an August 2007 campaign appearance in New Hampshire, Obama sparked outrage within the military in the course of vowing to get tougher in Afghanistan. "We've got to get the job done there," he said, "and that requires us to have enough troops so that we're not just air-raiding villages and killing civilians, which is causing enormous pressure over there."¹⁰ While many U.S. military personnel agreed on the need for more troops in Afghanistan, they took umbrage at the insinuation that the American forces in Afghanistan were simply firing into villages recklessly and killing civilians. With U.S. assets on the ground and in the air collecting information on what the military called the "human terrain," the U.S. military in Afghanistan went to considerable lengths to distinguish combatants from civilians. U.S. forces adhered to stringent regulations on the use of firepower, often putting the safety of Americans at risk for the benefit of the safety of Afghan civilians.

In July 2008, Obama's cancellation of a visit to injured troops at the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, fed suspicions that he viewed the military with disdain. In response to an outcry from veterans and Republican candidate John McCain, the Obama campaign offered competing explanations for the cancellation. Campaign strategist Robert Gibbs first asserted that Obama had "decided out of respect for these servicemen and women that it would be inappropriate to make a stop to visit troops at a U.S. military facility as part of a trip funded by the campaign." Gibbs subsequently said that the campaign had been swayed by military officials who had objected to the visit on the grounds that it would violate campaign rules.¹¹ Military officials, however, told the press that they had not recommended canceling the visit, and had been making preparations to receive the senator when they received notice that he would not be coming. According to their accounts, Obama's staff had canceled the visit after being informed that Obama "could only bring two or three of his Senate staff members, no campaign officials or workers" and "could not bring any media" with him except military photographers, because of rules prohibiting the use of military installations as campaign backdrops.¹²

Obama then sought to defuse the controversy by saying that when he was told he could not bring along retired Air Force Major General Scott Gration, a campaign volunteer, it "triggered then a concern that maybe our visit was going to be perceived as political, and the last thing that I want to do is have injured soldiers and the staff at these wonderful institutions having to sort through whether this is political or not or get caught in the crossfire between campaigns."¹³ Skeptics wondered how a visitation of wounded American troops without campaign workers or media could have been construed as partisan politics, particularly given that military officers had explained what he could do to make sure the visit was not considered a campaign event. Jeff Zeleny of the New York Times, one of the few media figures to call Obama's explanation into question, chided the Obama campaign for failing to answer this simple question: "Why didn't Obama leave his aides behind, even the retired general, and make the visit by himself?"¹⁴

Further evidence of Obama's aversion to interaction with the military during the campaign would emerge later in a book by reporter Michael Hastings. As recounted in the book, Hastings had been favorably disposed toward Obama early in the race, but disillusionment began to set in during the summer of 2008, when he learned that Obama had consciously avoided spending time with the troops during a visit to Iraq. After giving a talk at the U.S. embassy, Obama bristled when asked to take pictures with soldiers and embassy staffers. "He didn't want to take pictures with any more soldiers; he was complaining about it," a State Department official told Hastings. "Look, I was excited to meet him. I wanted to like him. Let's just

say the scales fell from my eyes after I did. These are people over here who've been fighting the war, or working every day for the war effort, and he didn't want to take fucking pictures with them?"¹⁵

It may have been that Obama avoided spending time with the troops simply because he was an introvert with little appetite for small talk. In future years, his disinclination to socialize even with friends and supporters would irritate many within the White House and in Congress. Nevertheless, these episodes furthered a growing perception that Obama held the military in low esteem, if not contempt.

During the Democratic primary, Obama faced little criticism for his positions on national security or his slights of the military. Hillary Clinton agreed with most of his national security platform except for the rapid withdrawal from Iraq, and she was not going to talk much about that subject because Obama's position on Iraq was more popular with Democratic voters than hers. Nor was she in a position to bring up the question of contempt for the military, since she had been accused of turning a cold shoulder to military personnel during her time as First Lady. She concentrated her fire on Obama's inexperience in foreign policy and his complete lack of leadership experience.

The former First Lady would go so far as to liken Obama to the man whom their mutual party had vilified more than any other figure in recent memory, President George W. Bush. "We've seen the tragic result of having a president who had neither the experience nor the wisdom to manage our foreign policy and safeguard our national security," Clinton told students at George Washington University on February 25, 2008. "We cannot let that happen again. America has already taken that chance one time too many."¹⁶

Obama responded to these barbs with barbs of his own about how Clinton herself lacked the experience to be commander in chief. He derided Clinton's claim that eight years in the White House as First Lady had given her valuable national security experience, and he contrasted the supposed luxuriousness of that position with his hardscrabble travel abroad. Whereas he had profited from "understanding the lives of the people like my grandmother who lives in a tiny hut in Africa," Obama said, Clinton could boast only of "what world leaders I went and talked to in the ambassador's house I had tea with." Clinton backers assailed that remark with blog posts such as "Obama Turns to Sexism in Final Push," and "Never mind that this woman has been serving this country for years, has traveled around the world giving speeches and impacting the lives of women, including in China, you know, going to places Barack has only read about in books."¹⁷

Obama adviser Greg Craig, a high-powered defense lawyer who had represented the likes of John Hinckley, Ted Kennedy, and Kofi Annan, conducted a point-by-point demolition of Hillary Clinton's national security resume as if she were a key prosecution witness. "There is no reason to believe," Craig asserted, "that she was a key player in foreign policy at any time during the Clinton Administration. She did not sit in on National Security Council meetings. She did not have a security clearance. She did not attend meetings in the Situation Room. She did not manage any part of the national security bureaucracy, nor did she have her own national security staff. She did not do any heavy-lifting with foreign governments, whether they were friendly or not. She never managed a foreign policy crisis, and there is no evidence to suggest that she participated in the decision-making that occurred in connection with any such crisis."¹⁸

National security would play only a minor role in Obama's contest with Arizona senator John McCain in the general election of 2008. The financial crisis of the fall of 2008 drowned out national security, to such an extent that the one presidential debate that had been reserved for national security ended up covering both the economy and national security. In that debate, held at the University of Mississippi, Obama went on the attack against McCain for supporting the Iraq War.

"Six years ago, I stood up and opposed this war at a time when it was politically risky to do so because I said

that not only did we not know how much it was going to cost, what our exit strategy might be, how it would affect our relationships around the world, and whether our intelligence was sound, but also because we hadn't finished the job in Afghanistan," Obama said. "We've spent over \$600 billion so far, soon to be \$1 trillion. We have lost over 4,000 lives. We have seen 30,000 wounded, and most importantly, from a strategic national security perspective, al Qaeda is resurgent, stronger now than at any time since 2001." As president, Obama said, he would remove all U.S. troops from Iraq within sixteen months.

McCain parried, "The next president of the United States is not going to have to address the issue as to whether we went into Iraq or not. The next president of the United States is going to have to decide how we leave, when we leave, and what we leave behind. That's the decision of the next president of the United States." The senator from Arizona noted that Obama had opposed the Iraq troop surge of 2007 on the grounds that it would fail, but recently had been forced to concede that it had succeeded spectacularly in quelling the violence. McCain also pointed out that top U.S. military leaders believed that a rapid withdrawal from Iraq of the sort Obama envisioned could cause the recent gains to crumble, imperiling the United States once more.

On Afghanistan, there was considerably less disagreement between the two candidates. "We have seen Afghanistan worsen, deteriorate," Obama said. "We need more troops there. We need more resources there." He vowed to send two to three additional American brigades to Afghanistan. McCain concurred on the need for additional forces for Afghanistan, though he said that Obama did not understand how they needed to be used.

McCain waited until the end of the debate to hammer Obama on his lack of experience. "There are some advantages to experience, and knowledge, and judgment," said McCain, a Vietnam War hero with decades of national security experience. "I honestly don't believe that Senator Obama has the knowledge or experience and has made the wrong judgments in a number of areas." McCain cited Obama's opposition to the Iraq surge, as well as his reluctance to criticize Russia for its invasion of Georgia earlier in the year.

With the debate clock winding down, Obama had one more turn. Rather than avail himself of the opportunity to counter McCain's remarks about experience, Obama talked vaguely about improving America's global image through spending on education. "Part of what we need to do," he said, "what the next president has to do—and this is part of our judgment, this is part of how we're going to keep America safe—is to send a message to the world that we are going to invest in issues like education, we are going to invest in issues that relate to how ordinary people are able to live out their dreams. And that is something that I'm going to be committed to as president of the United States."

According to post-debate surveys, viewers thought that Obama came across better on the economy, while McCain outperformed Obama on Iraq.¹⁹ With the economy tanking, those perceptions boded ill for McCain. Nor did it help that the incumbent Republican president, George W. Bush, had become very unpopular, or that the media made a concerted effort to tear down McCain's vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin.

When the votes were tallied on the evening of November 4, Obama came out the clear victor, with 52.9 percent of the popular vote and 365 of 538 electoral votes.

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