

Of Rhetoric and Reality

by George Lightbourn

Just a few short months ago, Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi were backbenchers whose primary task was to provide verbal shin kicks to the President and any member of Congress that stood between them and the majority. Seeing Pelosi ascend to the big chair last week was not only symbolic, it must have been a bit of a surprise for both her and Senator Reid.

Of course, Pelosi did what every victorious politician does; she equated the Democratic Party's takeover of the Senate and the House as a mandate. The people have spoken and the people said . . . We've heard the same speech after each election, but this time there was probably something to the claim. The American public has testified in poll after poll that they are weary of a war that has been dragged through our living rooms longer than our involvement in WWII.

But here's the thing, when you ascend to power you are expected to do something with it. Reid and Pelosi have done something – they sent a letter. And it was a dandy letter, with a lot more meat on the bones than either we the public, or even they the Congressional leaders, expected. They laid down the gauntlet on Iraq.

Speaker Pelosi, in explaining the letter, said that it is time the President stopped listening to his generals and start listening to the people. Apparently, Reid and Pelosi are those people. Most Americans, while disappointed with the direction the war in Iraq has taken, are equally perplexed as to what should be done. Not Reid and Pelosi, they know exactly what to do – get out! They want the President to drop the flag and begin the withdrawal in four-to-six weeks. That is pretty specific.

Upon hearing the Reid-Pelosi plan, you could almost hear the left whooping, up one coast and down the other. Meanwhile, the brooding right wasn't paying attention. They're preoccupied finding contractors to help them rebuild from the November tsunami.

It would be wrong to dismiss the Reid-Pelosi letter as a mere political statement. While it might have been expected that their letter would soon find its way to the top of the rhetorical bone heap in Washington, what they wrote in that letter went well beyond rhetoric.

They actually laid out the Democrat war strategy. They drew a line in the dirt and told the lame-duck President, here's the new war strategy; either carry it out or stand aside. The rise of Reid and Pelosi was impressive, even to conservatives, but have they overplayed their hand?

Many Americans will be drawn to the Reid-Pelosi strategy like we're drawn to comfort food on a blustery Midwestern evening. Their plan might seem like a

right headed way to disentangle from WMD, Abu Ghraib and botched hangings, but it's only a start. They've only shown us the clock face. We know there are hundreds of moving parts behind the face that allow us to know what time it is. (Forgive my pre-digital reference.) What are the details behind the Democrat war plan?

For example, the Reid-Pelosi letter speaks of a shift from combat to training and counter-terror. Exactly what does that mean and how will we know we're getting the job done? They speak of pressing the Iraqi political leaders to find a political resolution required to stabilize Iraq. Haven't we been trying to do this? What should we do different? These questions are not meant to belittle the Reid-Pelosi letter, but rather to highlight the profound nature of the letter. Whether intended or not, that letter put them right in the middle of the game. I'm not certain that was where they wanted to be, but they're there. And now we await the details behind their alternative war plan.

This stands to be one of those defining moments for America. We will hear the usual rhetoric and posturing emanating from the Hill, but it's likely we will hear much more. By the end of January, we should have two competing war strategies to consider. Somehow, they will be reduced to one single plan that the nation will have to abide by. And Reid and Pelosi will find themselves attached at the hip to whatever that plan is. I wonder if that was their intent when they penned that letter?