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war stories

The Man Who Knows Too Little

What Rudy Giuliani's greedy decision to quit the Iraq Study Group reveals about his candidacy.

By Fred Kaplan

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If you don't read *Newsday*, you might not know (I didn't until this week) that Rudy Giuliani was an original member of the Iraq Study Group—the blue-ribbon commission co-chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton—but he was forced out after failing to show up for any of the panel's meetings.

The day after the [Newsday story](#) appeared, [Giuliani explained](#) that he'd started thinking about running for president, and his presence on the panel might give it a political spin. "It didn't seem that I'd really be able to keep the thing focused on a bipartisan, nonpolitical resolution," he said.

The more likely reason for Giuliani's no-shows is much plainer—money. Craig Gordon, the *Newsday* reporter who wrote the story in the Long Island paper's June 19 edition, discovered that on the three days of meetings that Giuliani missed (before quitting), he was out of town, delivering highly lucrative speeches.

On April 12, 2006, he was giving a keynote address at an economics conference in South Korea for a fee of \$200,000. On May 18, he was giving a speech on leadership in Atlanta for \$100,000.

At that point, Baker gave Giuliani an ultimatum: Start showing up for sessions, or quit. On May 24, he quit, noting in a letter (provided to Gordon) that prior commitments prevented him from giving the panel his "full and active participation." (He was replaced by former Attorney General Edwin Meese, a puzzling choice for the job; maybe he was the only public figure Baker could find on such short notice. According to someone I know who attended one session, the elderly Meese "was barely conscious.")

Meanwhile, Giuliani was raking in exorbitant speaking fees around this time—according to Gordon, \$11.4 million in the course of 14 months, \$1.7 million for 20 speeches during the monthlong period that coincided with the Baker-Hamilton sessions.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. I doubt that I would have forgone six figures of easy income for the privilege of yakking about Iraq with a roomful of graybeards all day long. Then again, I wasn't about to run for president—the highest office of *public service*—on a résumé bereft of a single foreign-policy credential.

Rudy's choice—to go for the money—speaks proverbial volumes about his priorities.

His explanation for dropping out—that his impending run for the presidency would tarnish the panel's apolitical character—is dubious, to say the least.

First, it's not as if he signed up for the panel, *then* decided to run for president. He'd been set to run for months, if not years. (He seriously considered the idea—even gave a couple of fund-raising speeches in New Hampshire—as far back as late 1999.)

Second, *bipartisan* doesn't mean *nonpartisan*. James Baker—the Bush family's longtime *consigliere*, the Republican savior in the 2000 election—was the most non-nonpartisan co-chair that one could imagine. Giuliani's political ambitions, which were clearly detectable, would hardly have tainted the proceedings.

Third, it was widely assumed at the time that Baker-Hamilton would serve as Bush's vehicle for getting out of—or somehow otherwise resolving—Iraq. And Giuliani, like all other mainstream party members, was still very much in Bush's camp. To be a part of this 10-member panel—to claim the prestige of such august company, to play the role of politico-strategic statesman, and to gain instant credibility on a topic to which he'd previously had no exposure—should have been regarded as an enviable opportunity, both on its own terms and as a boost to his political fortune.

But—given a chance to elevate his standing, serve the country, and get educated on the nation's most pressing issue—Rudy went for the money.

Why did he accept the appointment in the first place? Many blue-ribbon panels are pro forma assemblages: Big names fill the roster; lowly staffers do the work. Giuliani may have signed up, fully aware of the gig's political value—then dropped out upon learning that it would cut into business.

It was not as if Giuliani feared the group might take positions that conflicted with his own. For, as [Josh Marshall](#) and his researchers at Talking Points Memo discovered (to their surprise), Giuliani *has* no position on Iraq. He has long supported Bush's decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein. But on the question of what to do now, he's been mum. Last week, Giuliani issued "[the 12 Commitments](#)," a document that lays out the agenda of his presidency. The First Commitment concerns terrorism ("I will keep America on offense in the Terrorists' War on Us"), but Iraq isn't mentioned at all.

[Asked about the omission](#), Giuliani said that the idea was to address issues that will still be with us in January 2009. "Iraq may get better, Iraq may get worse," he said. "We may be successful in Iraq, we may not be. I don't know the answer to that. That's in the hands of other people."

First, what a bizarrely evasive comment, even by politicians' standards. Second, does Giuliani have the slightest doubt that, whatever happens in the next 19 months, Iraq will remain one of the most urgent topics that a new president will have to confront?

The fact is, Giuliani has no idea what he's talking about. On the campaign trail he [says](#) that the terrorist threat "is something I understand better than anyone else running for president." As the mayor of New York City on Sept. 11, 2001, he may have lived more intimately with the consequences of terrorism, but this has no bearing on his inexperience or his scant insight in the realm of foreign policy. He is, in fact, that most dangerous would-be world leader: a man who doesn't seem to know how much he doesn't know.

Take even his relatively straightforward First Commitment—to stay "on offense" against the terrorists. What does that mean, exactly? How does it differ from what Bush is doing now, or from what any other candidate, Republican or Democrat, would do?

In a [campaign speech](#) two months ago, he spoke of the threat from the Iranians, then lumped them in with al-Qaida, saying, "Their movement has already displayed more aggressive tendencies by coming here and killing us." When *New York Times* reporter Marc Santoro asked him afterward to clarify the remark, inasmuch as Iran had no connection to 9/11 and that its people are mainly Shiites while al-Qaida is composed of Sunnis, Giuliani replied, "They have a similar objective in their anger at the modern world."

What was he suggesting—that everyone who's hostile to the West should be regarded as part of a monolithic threat? Are they really all trying to kill us? Are they therefore all to be treated as an enemy to be crushed or conquered? Is there no point or possibility in trying to exploit the divisions among them? If so, where will President Giuliani get the troops and firepower needed for the multiple wars ahead?

A number of times, most recently [in New Hampshire](#), Giuliani has likened the war on terrorism to the war on crime that he waged as mayor. Just as the "Comp-stat" technique—daily computerized tracking of where crimes are being committed, followed by instant redeployment of police—helped slash crime

in New York City, similar methods, he suggested, can slash illegal border crossings and prevent acts of terrorism.

The analogy is off-kilter. Criminals, unlike terrorists, generally don't steal, rape, or murder for ideological causes. Nor does the New York City police chief need to negotiate with, say, the Brooklyn borough president in order to send more cops to Flatbush Avenue.

Even in his own realm, Giuliani has displayed uneven judgment. After 9/11, he rallied the city with gallant eloquence and organized the recovery with impressive skill. But before the attack, he installed a high-tech counterterrorism office on the 23rd floor of the World Trade Center's Building No. 7—even though terrorists had tried to blow up the trade center back in 1993. (On 9/11, Building 7 was destroyed by the Twin Towers' rubble.)

Giuliani also failed, ahead of time, to create a liaison between the police and fire departments, or to make their radios interoperable—a failure that may have cost many firefighters their lives. He also urged President Bush to hire his crony Bernard Kerik, first to train the Iraqi security forces, then to run the U.S. Homeland Security Department. Bush went along with the first, to no good effect, and was about to OK the second until the feds unearthed Kerik's massive record of corruption.

Where is the evidence that Giuliani's best behavior as mayor, before or after 9/11, says anything about his qualifications to be president?

His shrugged blow-off of Baker-Hamilton offers a glimpse at the darker side of America's Mayor: that he's in it not for the country, but for himself.

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