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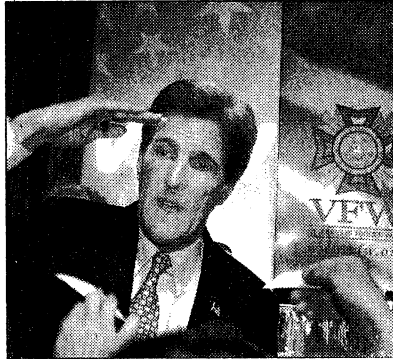
# Will swing voters buy Kerry's patriotic charade?



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Where is the outrage? The war in Iraq is the key issue in the upcoming election. The Democratic Party is overwhelmingly anti-war, so much so that Democrats flirted with giving the nomination to obscure former Gov. Howard Dean before his odd personality and primal screams awoke their common sense. So Democrats should be furious that the candidate they chose, John Kerry, refuses to say what almost every committed Democrat believes, that the war is foolish and immoral, an unmitigated disaster. Kerry refuses to take any coherent position on the war. At various times he has been for the war, at other times against. At times he has been for funding the troops, at other times against. All we know for sure is that Kerry would prefer that other countries do more of the fighting and that Kerry will unveil his secret, foolproof plan for a stable Iraq sometime after the election.

Kerry's most recent pronouncement – an assertion that he, too, would have sent American troops to topple Saddam Hussein, even knowing what he knows now – should have sent shockwaves through the Democratic rank-and-file. Yet the Democrats' intense anger remains



Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass, campaigns last Wednesday at the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention in Cincinnati.

focused on George W. Bush, their own candidate untouched, despite his refusal to articulate the Democratic position on the biggest issue facing the country. Why?

Because Democrats know the real John Kerry. Democrats are willing to tolerate, even encourage, Kerry to say and do what he must to get elected. If it is necessary to wave the flag and cheer Vietnam, so be it. Democrats know they have a well-earned reputation for being soft on defense. The Democratic Party, after all, is the one that constantly tried to undercut and belittle Ronald

Reagan as he was winning the Cold War. Americans are not stupid. They may vote for Democrats in times of peace. But they are hesitant to vote for Democrats when the country faces danger from abroad. In a post-9/11 world, that is a problem for Democrats. They know that they must talk tough about the war to win this election, even if they find it distasteful.

But Democrats also know John Kerry, and they know all the election props – the salute, the smiling veterans, the constant references to a strong military – are necessary parts of a well-orchestrated charade. Democrats know that Kerry's four months of service in Vietnam – the centerpiece of his campaign – do not qualify him to be president. There are many Vietnam veterans. If Vietnam service alone qualified a person to be president, we would have literally tens of thousands of qualified candidates.

Democrats know better. They know that Kerry must talk about his four months patrolling Vietnamese rivers, but that his service three decades ago says little about his fitness to be president. Much more telling is Kerry's two decades in the United States Senate. And Kerry's Senate record gives Democrats all

the comfort they need. Democrats know that President Kerry would not be the 20-something Conqueror of Vietnam but rather the 50-something Senator from Massachusetts who has routinely voted against new weapons systems, intelligence funding and a muscular foreign policy.

Kerry talks tough. But Democrats know Kerry's true colors, and this anti-war party knows that it has nothing to fear from its candidate. They know that Kerry will give the war in Iraq, and the larger war on terror, the same amount of attention and resolve as would Dean or any other Democrat not named Joe Lieberman. Democrats know Kerry, and they are comfortable with his foreign-policy judgment.

John Kerry has not fooled Democrats. He is hoping to fool the swing voters who will decide the election. Kerry wants those voters to believe that he is strong on defense – even though his record says otherwise. Kerry wants those voters to believe he is ready to defend America from a dangerous foreign threat – even though he has been nominated by a party that refuses to take that threat seriously. Kerry has not fooled Democrats. We'll know soon whether the props and tough talk have fooled America's swing voters.