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## John McCain and the Neocon Resurgence

**T**he neoconservatives, who have never been right about anything, have lately suffered more knockdowns than "The Bull of the Pampas," Luis Firpo, did in his first round with Jack Dempsey in 1923, but hopes for their demise as a political force have unfortunately proven to be premature. Part of the problem is that the blog and counterculture world where the neocons have been eviscerated is not the world of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, Fox News, or the *Wall Street Journal*, where they continue to set the pace on the editorial and opinion pages. The presence of two neoconservatives, William Kristol and David Brooks, at the ostensibly liberal *New York Times* is a testimony to their resiliency, as is the *Times'* endorsement of John McCain as the Republican presidential nominee. Beyond the media, the neocons have deeply embedded themselves in the political system and continue to play a major role in the campaigns of the various presidential candidates of both parties, frequently as foreign policy advisers.

With the withdrawal of Romney, Washington pundits unanimously agree that John McCain will defeat Huckabee to become the Republican nominee. McCain is the neocons' anointed choice for president of the United States, and has been so for many years. He was their candidate when he ran against George Bush in the primaries in 2000 and again when he announced his candidacy for 2008. When McCain's campaign underachieved last summer and it appeared that Rudy Giuliani would be the Republican candidate, many leading neocons, including Norman Podhoretz and Daniel Pipes, joined the New Yorker's campaign. Now that Giuliani has withdrawn, they will presumably return home again, rejoining Robert Kagan and James Woolsey, both of whom have been with McCain since early 2007. That McCain is no traditional conservative if measured by his views on cultural and fiscal issues matters not at all, because the Israel-and-empire-fixated neocons consider such issues unimportant. Nor is there any concern for McCain's hypocrisy on other issues, such as torture, where he publicly opposed the administration before agreeing to a White House-supported bill that permitted waterboarding and other practices.

With McCain as their nominee, the Republicans will be running on a "fear" platform, emphasizing the threat posed by terrorism. Mitt Romney withdrew citing the necessity of winning in Iraq and not surrendering to the terrorists, implying that such pusillanimity is precisely what one might expect from the Democrats if the Republicans do not present a united front. McCain's subsequent speech at the American Conservative Union (ACU) convention provided more of the same, calling for action against Iran and victory over Islamic extremists. On the following day, President Bush called for Republican unity and made essentially the same points about terrorists. It is clear that the Republicans will be the party of war and that they will emphasize their ability to deal with international threats better than the Democrats.

The neocons and McCain do not disguise their belief that Iran must be dealt with by military means because diplomacy has failed. Indeed, one might well regard de-fanging Iran as their principal foreign policy objective, one that they share with the White House and the Israeli government. John McCain's sentiment toward Iran is unrelentingly belligerent. One only has to recall his rendition of the Beach Boys' song "Barbara Ann" substituting the words "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to realize that the ideologically driven Arizona Republican is not interested in talk if cruise missiles are available. McCain's version of "straight talk" on Iran suggests that he lacks the basic good judgment the American public would presumably like to see in a president.

McCain's speech before the ACU revealed that he supports the U.S. presence in Iraq until there is a

"victory," that he will not allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon, and that he is committed to fighting against "Islamic extremists" for as long as it takes to defeat them. In an earlier speech in New Hampshire he stated that it would be fine with him if the U.S. were to remain in Iraq for one hundred years. In Florida, shortly before that state's primary, McCain declared that there would be "other wars" in America's future, but that "we will never surrender." There should be no confusion about McCain's intentions, which are basically all war all the time. He has also declared that the United States has a right to deal with "rogue states" as it sees fit, and he has thrown down a challenge to Russia, insisting that Moscow should be expelled from the G-8 group of industrialized nations and that NATO should be expanded to include the Ukraine and Georgia, which the Kremlin would see as a direct threat. Ronald Reagan, who won the first Cold War, would undoubtedly be horrified by McCain's intention to start a second one.

Many observers in Washington believe that McCain intends to pull a shrewd maneuver to enhance his electability by packaging himself as someone who can end the partisan divide in Congress. McCain knows that the Republican Party's conservative base, which mistrusts him, has nowhere else to go in national elections. Able to take them for granted, he is already speaking of reaching out to moderates, liberals, and traditional Democrats. He has worked closely with the Democrats on many occasions, and his voting record on many issues is decidedly non-Republican. He co-sponsored the McCain-Feingold legislation on political contributions and collaborated on the stillborn McCain-Kennedy amnesty plan for illegal immigrants, both of which were opposed by the Republican Party's conservative base.

To turn himself into a one-man bridge over troubled political waters, McCain will reportedly insist that his vice president be Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a lifelong Democrat who currently calls himself an independent. Lieberman endorsed McCain at the end of December and campaigned actively on his behalf in New Hampshire, Michigan, South Carolina, and Florida. In Florida he spoke to numerous Jewish groups around Miami, emphasizing McCain's support for Israel. Photos of McCain campaigning frequently feature Lieberman standing in the background. Joe Lieberman is also no social conservative, so he and McCain should get along just fine on most issues. Sources in Washington believe that Lieberman will conveniently become a Republican to gain the GOP's acceptance.

Joe Lieberman denies that he would even consider the position of vice president with his friend McCain, but one should note that an initial denial of one's true intentions has become routine in American politics. As the self-described "conscience of the Senate," Lieberman has voted a straight Democratic Party line on most issues, though he is most definitely a hard-liner when it comes to Israel and the Middle East. When he ran against Ned Lamont for the Senate in Connecticut in 2006 he denounced the latter as weak on Israeli security, saying that Lamont had surrounded himself with "people who were ... explicitly against Israel." Lieberman, like McCain, would like to attack Iran. He was the co-sponsor of the Kyl-Lieberman amendment that passed Congress in September 2007. Kyl-Lieberman declared that Iran is killing American soldiers and led to the naming of part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group, which would permit military action against it without any deliberation by Congress. Lieberman is opposed to negotiating with the Iranians, claiming that it is akin to a firefighter negotiating with an arsonist. He favors military action to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapons program and asserts that Iran is already at war with the U.S.

Americans who have opposed the Iraq war and who are against another war with Iran should begin to worry, because a McCain-Lieberman ticket would be very electable. It would be promoted as a demonstration that bipartisanship can work in Washington, and it would draw support from many independents and from a Democratic base that would welcome its relatively moderate positions on social issues and immigration. Many would be attracted by its lack of close ties to the religious Right. McCain-Lieberman would also play the fear card extremely well, rallying both the Republican base, which is largely willing to ignore social issues when it comes to national security, and conservative Democrats. This would likely complete America's transition to a militarized state and would empower terrorists everywhere, resulting in constant warfare and bankrupting the United States in fairly short order. Such is the price of the neocon new world order.

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