



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 26, 2009

Keynesians and Kahnsians Populate D.C.

A friend who is an admirer of the great neocon wars once asked me, “Why do you hate the neocons so?” I thought hate was too strong a word, especially after he assured me that he did not “hate” Bill Clinton. In fact, he said, he applauded the “commander in briefs” for what my friend insists was the one good thing Clinton did in his eight years as president: He bombed great portions of the former Yugoslavia, reducing cities to great mountains of rubble.



Yes, the only good thing Clinton did, my friend believes, was bomb other lands and peoples to oblivion. The fact that as president, Clinton and the Republicans worked together to achieve a balanced budget, albeit with some creative bookkeeping, apparently counts for nothing. My friend and I are both old enough to remember when Republicans prided themselves on fiscal conservatism and staying out of foreign wars. Now they pride themselves on bombing the bejabbers out of people who never attacked us and pretending deficits don't matter.

Now that both the White House and the Congress are in the hands of the Democrats, perhaps Republicans will rediscover the dangers of deficits. They should matter, even to neocons, when Obama and his allies are deliberately tripling or quadrupling them — for prosperity, of course. But when it comes to war, at least my friend is consistent. He supports even what Bob Dole used to call “Democrat wars.”

You may recall Dole's most notorious use of that term. It was when the droll Kansan ran as the GOP's vice presidential candidate in 1976 and was in a debate with his Democratic counterpart, Sen. Walter Mondale of Minnesota. “All the wars of the 20th Century have been Democrat wars,” Dole declared, provoking outrage in Mondale and others who believe that all our wars are blessed with bi-partisan virtue and [Kate Smith's patriotism](#).

Sen. Dole must be happy now that the wars of the 21st century have been righteous Republican wars, at least for now. Our president, whom we may soon be calling O'bomber, has been in office scarcely more than 100 days. But he has already elongated the time he had previously said it would take to get out our troops of Iraq. And he is committed to wading ever deeper into Afghanistan, that graveyard of empires. How much longer before Afghanistan becomes Obama's war? And what are the chances of winning it? This neocon disease has actually been infecting and making mad the Republican Party for longer than



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the word itself has been in circulation. Long before George McGovern and the Ho Chi Minh fan club drove liberal Democrats like Irving Kristol into the GOP tent, Republicans were adapting to the new order of things. The Cold War made warriors of us all. Nixon reportedly wanted Eisenhower to save the French bacon in Indochina in 1954. Two years later, there were more than a few on the right who held war hero Ike in contempt for not engaging Russian tanks in Hungary.

Ike's landing in Lebanon was aimed at securing the airport temporarily, not for occupying the country indefinitely. One might question the legitimacy of sending the 101st Airborne to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, but at least Eisenhower recognized that war, even civil war, in Arkansas posed a greater threat to America's peace and security than the slaughterhouse known geographically as the Middle East.

Are we as a nation capable of thinking critically anymore? May we at least recognize that while burning an American flag in protest of our war-making is despicable, waving it as a gesture of patriotism is no substitute for hard thought about the cost, in both lives and money, of our empire. Neoconservatives are proud of wars and tax cuts. Meanwhile, our national debt has become a threat to interest rates in the short term and our survival in the long run. But do today's "conservatives" even care about the long run?

President Richard Nixon attempted to do in the early Seventies what Obama is attempting now. He tried to spend our way to prosperity. Many conservatives supporting that Republican administration had a Damascus Road conversion on debts and deficits, mistaking political expedience for a new revelation of truth. They got over their hang-ups about deficit spending. It would stimulate the old economy. They suddenly found wisdom where they once only saw only ruin — in the economic theories of British socialist John Maynard Keynes. And it was Keynes who dismissed long-term consequences of deficits by saying, "In the long run, we are all dead."

"We're all Keynesians now," Nixon declared. If the Republican right was scandalized, the old guard quickly recovered. They had hitched their wagons to Nixon's star and were not likely to unhitch when that star shone over the White House. They rode with him to a 49-state victory in November of 1972. As a poet said, "'Twas a famous victory." Along the way the Nixon gang committed a few little crimes that drove a few people into prison and nearly destroyed the Grand Old Party.

But Nixon had his legacy. Republicans are nearly all Keynesians now, while the Democrats in Obama land are Keynesians on steroids. And that's not all. With their love of militarism and conquest, both parties are, for the most part, not only Keynesians, but Kahnsians.

Genghis Kahnsians.



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