



## Neoconservatism in the Obama Age

Some traditional conservatives were hoping that with Bush leaving office and Obama coming in, the neocons would be put out of power, but sadly, they're not going away that easily. Contrary to the public's perception of President-elect Obama as the peace candidate, he has been extremely hawkish in his appointments. The selection of Joe Biden as a running mate was a sign that the globalist and hawkish wing of the Democratic Party (where the neocons originally hailed from) was going to be strongly represented in an Obama administration. Back in 1999, Joe Biden cosponsored a resolution with John McCain and Joe Lieberman to use ground troops in Serbia, coinciding with the wishes of a neoconservative think tank called the Project for a New American Century (PNAC).



Obama's multiple appointments of liberal war hawks, former Clinton officials, and individuals with neocon ties is worrisome. Investigative reporter Robert Dreyfuss reported on the close alliance between these new appointments and the neocons. "Several top advisers to Obama — including Tony Lake, United Nations ambassador-designate Susan Rice, Tom Daschle and Dennis Ross, along with leading Democratic hawks like Richard Holbrooke, close to vice president-elect Joe Biden or secretary of state-designate Hillary Clinton — have made common cause with war-minded think-tank hawks at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and other hard-line institutes."

Former CIA Officer Phillip Giraldi has warned that top Obama adviser Dennis Ross was part of a task force consisting mostly of neocons that issued a report that "advocated talking to Tehran to give it a chance to surrender on all key issues before attacking it, urging the next president to build up forces for the assault from day one of the new administration." The task force recommended that failure of the talks be followed up with a "show of force" in the region, involving a blockade of Iranian gas imports and oil exports, which would in turn be followed up with "kinetic action," a U.S. assault on Iran. That doesn't exactly sound like the diplomatic approach trumpeted by Obama on the campaign trail. Ross has worked closely with neocon think tanks like PNAC and WINEP, as well as for FOX News, where he was a strong advocate for war against Iraq.

The appointment of Marine Corps Gen. James L. Jones as national security adviser is also a bad omen according to Doug Bandow of the American Conservative Defense Alliance. Bandow writes that Jones is "an advocate of higher military spending, and his most famous proposal was disastrously bad: to place a NATO force, presumably including Americans, in the West Bank. Is there a dumber region in which to station American soldiers and Marines? Maybe Iraq, but then the Palestinian territories come in at a



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strong second place."

These appointments seem to be in touch with Obama's interventionist foreign policy stances which were summed up by journalist and author Jeremy Scahill. Scahill writes:

Several of the individuals at the center of Obama's transition and emerging foreign policy teams were top players in creating and implementing foreign policies that would pave the way for projects eventually carried out under the Bush/Cheney administration. With their assistance, Obama has already charted out several hawkish stances. Among them:

- His plan to escalate the war in Afghanistan;
- An Iraq plan that could turn into a downsized and rebranded occupation that keeps U.S. forces in Iraq for the foreseeable future;
- His labeling of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a "terrorist organization;"
- His pledge to use unilateral force inside of Pakistan to defend U.S. interests;
- His position, presented before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), that Jerusalem "must remain undivided" — a remark that infuriated Palestinian officials and which he later attempted to reframe;
- His plan to continue the War on Drugs, a backdoor U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Central and Latin America;
- His refusal to "rule out" using Blackwater and other armed private forces in U.S. war zones, despite previously introducing legislation to regulate these companies and bring them under U.S. law.

Another red flag for the American public is that the neocons seem to be beside themselves with adoration for Obama. Phillip Giraldi explained the establishment praise for Obama as pundits who "joined the song of praise being raised by neocons and faux-conservatives alike lauding Barack Obama's cabinet for its 'moderation' and 'centrism.' What that really means, of course, is that they are all recognizing that Obama will preserve the Bush status quo when it comes to foreign policy, a heady mix of American exceptionalism combined with muscular democracy promotion and interventionism." William Kristol had very kind words for the president-elect and stated that he's poised for presidential success. John McCain even applauded the appointments!

Rush Limbaugh praised the appointment of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state as "brilliant."

Senator Joe Lieberman, who broke ranks with Democrats allegedly over foreign policy concerns to endorse McCain, called the appointments "virtually perfect."

Neocon David Horowitz actually reprimanded conservative activists whom he felt were unnecessarily filing lawsuits regarding Barack's citizenship status, not because he didn't believe the claims, but rather because Obama has shown his true hawkish nature for which conservatives should be appreciative. "Now, as president-elect he has just formed the most conservative foreign policy team since John F. Kennedy, one well to the right of Bill Clinton. Where is your gratitude for that? What is more relevant in his Hillary Clinton pick — her prickly past or the fact that except for Joe Lieberman, she is the Democrat most identified with support for the Iraq War?" This neocon wants conservative activists to be grateful for Hillary Clinton!? His most revealing response was when he exclaimed, "And please don't write me about the Constitution." These last two statements should put to rest any notion that neocons care about traditional conservative values. It would appear that as long as their lust for



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war and global democratic revolution is satisfied, they do not care about much else.

This dynamic of neocons versus liberal interventionists seems to be along the lines of good cop vs. bad cop. Both parties want the same result, but they play opposing roles to con the third party (in this case, independent voters) into trusting them even though they both share the same goals. And when you really think about it: what is the difference between a neocon and a liberal war hawk anyway? Not much of a difference at all considering that neocons were liberal war hawks a few decades ago. Neocon Max Boot admitted this much while praising Obama. "I am gob smacked by these appointments, most of which could just as easily have come from a President McCain.... [Hillary] Clinton and [James] Steinberg at State should be powerful voices for 'neo-liberalism' which is not so different in many respects from 'neo-conservatism.'"

Constitutional conservatives could really distinguish themselves on foreign policy from the neocons of the Bush years and the liberal hawks that Obama is bringing to the White House. Doug Bandow, of the American Conservative Defense Alliance, suggests:

The only way to change this dangerous dynamic is for those who believe in limited government and individual liberty to use their votes to punish war-mongers in either party.... And given the current ascendancy of liberals within the Democratic Party, foreign policy offers an opportunity for the Right.... Rather than attempt to outspend the Democrats on defense and promote even more frivolous interventions than those advanced by the acolytes of Madeleine Albright, conservatives should offer a genuine alternative: *republican noninterventionism*. Defend America, but turn military responsibilities over to rich allies in Asia and Europe and avoid involvement in tragic but irrelevant Third World conflicts. *Stand for the Constitution and defend republic over empire against Wilsonians on the Left and Right.* [Emphasis added.]



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