

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Jul 6, 2011): <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/tim-pawlenty-the-latest-dangerous-neoconservative-5561>

## Tim Pawlenty: The Latest Dangerous Neoconservative

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| July 5, 2011

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Republicans have spent a decade as the party of war. In fact, since President George W. Bush abandoned his call for a “humble foreign policy” the country has not been at peace. Now former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty has unabashedly raised the neoconservative banner.

President Bill Clinton famously wished to be a wartime leader, but ordering 78 days of high-altitude bombing of Serbia doesn’t count. When he left office Americans were not in combat, other than undertaking episodic air and missile strikes to enforce the “no fly” zone over Iraq. Looking back, those were the good ole days.

Unfortunately, this relative peace ended with 9/11. Rather than limit his response to targeting al-Qaeda, President Bush launched two nation-building crusades.

The first, in Afghanistan, is nearing its tenth year with little success to show. As the attack on the Intercontinental Hotel demonstrates, even the capital of Kabul is not safe.

The second, in Iraq, generated a new terrorist franchise and turned an entire nation into a charnel house. Over time, U.S. military operations spread into Pakistan and Yemen, and today qualify as “hostilities” by any definition except that used by the Obama administration.

President Barack Obama has initiated his own war, in Libya, for largely discredited humanitarian claims. Nevertheless, the GOP’s most avid cheerleaders for war, Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, have pressed for escalation in North Africa. Sen. Graham also has proposed military action against Syria.

Four years ago advocates of permanent war dominated the Republican presidential race. Rudy Giuliani was perhaps the most hawkish but least informed candidate. The other GOP presidential candidates, other than Rep. Ron Paul, also advocated pursuing the American imperium, irrespective of cost. Even Mitt Romney, who presented himself as a responsible businessman, sounded like a neocon bot.

Sen. McCain ended up as the Republican presidential nominee and his hawkish mien defined the GOP fall campaign. He even urged confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia in its conflict with the country of Georgia—which started the conflict. Had McCain won the election, no one knows how many additional wars Washington now would be fighting.

But reality has made a reemergence in Republican ranks. Rep. Paul has been joined by another ideological libertarian, former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson. Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman has expressed skepticism of the Afghan war. And the newly refurbished Mitt Romney has taken several carefully choreographed steps away from the neocon cry of “Afghanistan forever.”

The result has been much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the neoconservative camp, and especially by Senators McCain and Graham. In their view, anyone who fails to endorse killing foreigners <sup>[3]</sup> in at least five different countries or believes that Americans cannot afford to forever police the globe is an “isolationist.”

Now candidate Pawlenty has taken up the cry of “war now, war forever” with his speech to the Council on Foreign Relations. Naturally, it took him little time to toss the “I” word at his primary opponents: “parts of the Republican Party now seem to be trying to out-bid the Democrats in appealing to isolationist sentiments.”

The talk was long on rhetoric but short on reality. Candidate Pawlenty obviously is a true believer in Washington’s ability to run the world. The U.S. president need only speak with sufficient firmness—unlike Barack Obama, naturally—and the world will come to heel.

Pawlenty focused on the struggle of Arab peoples against authoritarian governments, many long supported by the United States: “We can help steer events in the right direction.” He complained that the Obama administration stood by as an election was stolen in Iran only “to see the Green Movement crushed.” He decried the reduction in foreign aid as “a lack of support” for democracy in Egypt. Declared Pawlenty: “I called for Assad’s departure on March 29; I call for it again today.”

As for policy, Pawlenty called for more American micro-management in more countries:

\*“We must do more than monitor polling places.”

\*We must use foreign aid “to build good allies.”

\*“We must insist that our international partners get off the sidelines and do the same.”

\*We must tell new government “the truth,” that “economic growth and prosperity are the result of free markets and free trade.”

\*We must “commit America’s strength to removing Qaddafi.”

\*“We should press new friends to end discrimination against women, to establish independent courts, and freedom of speech and the press.”

\*“We must insist on religious freedoms for all.”

\*“We need to tell the Saudis what we think.”

\*“We need to be frank about what the Saudis must do to insure stability in their own country. Above all, they need to reform and open their own society.”

\*“We need to encourage opponents of the [Syrian] regime by making our own position very clear, right now. Bashar al-Assad must go.”

\*We must “hasten the fall of the mullahs” in Iran.

\*We should keep the military option against Tehran on the table.

\*“Peace will only come if everyone in the region perceives clearly that America stands strongly with Israel.”

\*“I would ensure our assistance to the Palestinians immediately ends if the teaching of hatred in Palestinian classrooms and airwaves continues.”

\*“I would recommend cultivating and empowering moderate forces in Palestinian society.”

\*We must seek “victory” like “in the 1980s.”

It’s an impressive litany, and most of the sentiments are reasonable or at least defensible. But most are sentiments, not policies. And certainly not realistic policies. Nor are any of the points new. Unfortunately, none so far has worked. Because most people, irrespective of how friendly, will not allow Washington to run their lives. They want to govern themselves.

Of course, foreign aid should be used to build “good allies.” Like giving billions of dollars to Hosni Mubarak year in and year out. He was a “good ally.” Moreover, with his overthrow has come rising hostility to Israel and religious minorities. Does Pawlenty believe that all we have to do is “insist” that the newly democratic Egyptians adopt our liberal values and all will be well?

Of course, the Saudi ruling family should be encouraged to reform. Does Pawlenty believe that the Saudi royals run a quasi-totalitarian state because they have never considered the benefits of reform? That all we have to do is tell the Riyadh autocrats that empowering women and freeing religious minorities would be good for the country, and the regime will act?

Why didn’t Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama realize how easy it was?

Naturally, Pawlenty closed with the usual rhetorical boilerplate used to justify an American imperium. It is wrong “for the Republican Party to shrink from the challenges of American leadership.” “Weakness in foreign policy costs us and our children much more than we’ll save in a budget line item.” “America already has one political party devoted to decline, retrenchment, and withdrawal.” “Our enemies in the War on Terror, just like our opponents in the Cold War, respect and respond to strength.” Of course. All the U.S. government has to do is stand strong for “the ideals of economic and political freedom of equality and opportunity for all citizens” and all will be well.

Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel said Samuel Johnson, and so it is today. What current politician does not believe in the traditional values which have animated the American republic? What presidential candidate does not want to ensure U.S. security in a dangerous world? What national leader wants America and Americans to be isolated from and uninvolved in the world?

The challenge is how to best promote those values and best ensure that security. America as empire—constantly bombing, hectoring, invading, lecturing, occupying, and instructing other states—is not.

Today the U.S. is involved in the equivalent of five wars: Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, and Libya. Americans have not enjoyed peace for more than a decade, and if Tim Pawlenty has his way, would not enjoy peace for years if not decades to come.

The costs are high. Some 6000 Americans have died and tens of thousands of Americans have been wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, and the human toll continues to climb. In Iraq perhaps 200,000 civilians died in the violent aftermath to the U.S. invasion; millions of people were pushed into internal or external exile; the historic Christian community was ravaged. The financial cost continues to rise. Washington is effectively bankrupt, with a \$14 trillion national debt, trillions more in unfunded federal retirement liabilities, and more than \$100 trillion in unfunded Social Security and Medicare obligations. Yet America has doubled military spending, adjusted for inflation, over the last decade. The U.S. now spends more, in real terms, than at any point in the Cold, Korean, and Vietnam wars, and accounts for roughly half of the globe’s military outlays.

Finally, every new bombing run, invasion, and occupation creates more enemies, and thus encourages more terrorism. Better calibrated responses relying on Special Forces, drones, intelligence, and international cooperation are less costly, more effective, and less likely to trigger blowback.

Far from being an early neocon, Ronald Reagan was a master of restraint. He used force only three times—in Grenada, Libya, and Lebanon. All were limited actions, and in the latter case Reagan responded to the bombing of the Marine Corps barracks by pulling out U.S. forces rather than launching a nation-building campaign. He recognized that the stakes in Lebanon were no where near the cost of expanding the conflict.

Ultimately, advocates of limited government and individual liberty must choose between empire and freedom. Perpetual intervention and conflict have been among the most important political fertilizers for the growth of the Leviathan state.

Tim Pawlenty has endorsed war and Big Government. Let us hope his competitors decide differently.

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