

John McCain, RIP: Washington's War Party Loses its Leader

Doug Bandow

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John McCain has left us. He died as courageously as he lived. But the great tragedy of his life was his advocacy of war and military intervention at almost every turn.

He backed the Afghan, Iraq, and Libyan wars. He urged military strikes on North Korea and Iran. He visited Syrian insurgents to push U.S. intervention in that complex murderfest.

McCain supported the Saudis' brutal war against Yemen. He urged military action against Nigeria and Sudan. He pushed Washington to confront Russia over Georgia and lamented the lack of military options in Ukraine.

Thankfully he never reached the presidency. Lauded for his foreign policy expertise, McCain's talent was limited to proclaiming "bomb them" at strategic political moments.

War was a first resort, the obvious answer to most any international problem, whatever the specifics. If only Washington would impose its will abroad, Pax America would emerge.

Alas, the transition to peace in our time proved to be messy. Thousands of Americans and hundreds of thousands of foreigners died in John McCain's wars. Millions of people were displaced. Religious minorities were slaughtered and expelled.

Of course, McCain was not alone responsible for America's permanent state of war. But he was the single most influential of the Senate's unofficial horsemen of the apocalypse.

His personal story, highlighted by years of captivity in Vietnam, gave him unique credibility. Through Democratic and Republican administration alike he campaigned for war.

The good news is that there is no one to replace him. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham lacks McCain's experience and gravitas. Unlike McCain, Graham cannot say that he knew war. Rather, he knew a guy who knew war. He was McCain's faithful sidekick but always came across as the second team.

Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas is no less irresponsible than McCain, but never became the constant media presence. His ambition was more transparent. When Cotton speaks, Washington thankfully does not listen.

Sen. Jim Inhofe is likely to take over the Senate Armed Services Committee chairmanship. He is traditionally hawkish and believes the budget of the Pentagon should be without limit. But he is two years older than was McCain and is better known for his skepticism of claims of climate change than as an advocate of promiscuous war-making.

New Jersey's Sen. Bob Menendez has gained a reputation as a reliable but not particularly articulate hawk. He has been bedeviled by charges of impropriety and might not survive the November election.

The House has yielded no similar celebrated advocates of war here, there, and everywhere. The pressure to satisfy constituents is much greater on congressmen, forcing them to focus on issues of interest to most Americans. Advocating yet another international crusade in which average folks may find their sons, fathers, and brothers—and these days daughters, mothers, and sisters—coming home in a box is not likely to be a big vote-winner.

In short, the subtraction of John McCain's voice from Washington's incessant war-mongering Greek Chorus will reduce pressure on the president to bomb, invade, and occupy more countries. Moreover, McCain's death creates an opportunity for new and improved Republican Party foreign policy spokesmen to emerge.

Senators Rand Paul and Mike Lee and Rep. Justin Amash have been advocating an approach more consistent with the GOP's purported commitment to limited government and individual liberties. Others who might have been intimidated by McCain's reputation and angry, insistent personality may feel freer to express skepticism of Washington's conventional wisdom for intervention and war.

The pressure to find peaceful alternatives will only increase as Uncle Sam's bankruptcy grows more imminent. The current administration and Congress simultaneously hiked outlays and reduced revenues, pushing this year's deficit toward a \$1 trillion. Fiscal pressures will grow even worse as Social Security and Medicare spending explodes as the population continues to age.

As pressure to cut spending rises, so will reluctance to provide foot soldiers for a new American empire. Those of military age demonstrate less enthusiasm for unending Neoconservative crusades initiated by their elders. Peace rather than socialism might become the signature issue for the young.

The end of the Cold War provided America with an opportunity to become a normal country again, in which the security and prosperity of its own people became the priority of its government. Now is the time for all good Republicans to come to the aid of their party, and, more important, country.

*Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of *Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire*.*