

The zombie neocons have risen from the dead and found a new Dubbya

Mehdi Hasan – November 5, 2012

Susan Katz, an undecided voter, put these questions to Mitt Romney during the second presidential debate in New York on 16 October: What is the biggest difference between you and George W Bush and how do you differentiate yourself from George W Bush? The Republican candidate reeled off five differences between him and the worst US president in living memory. All of them, however, were related to economic or domestic policy. He had little to say about how he would differentiate himself from Dubbya on foreign policy. The honest answer would have been: not very much.

Romney is running for Bush's third term. Listen to the verdict of Christopher A Preble, from the centre-right **Cato Institute** in Washington, DC: Romney's likely to be in the mould of George W Bush when it comes to foreign policy. Check out the list of special advisers on foreign policy posted on Romney's website: 17 of the 24 advisers worked as senior officials in the Bush/Cheney administration (and four of them signed the now notorious letter from the neoconservative Project for the New American Century nine days after 9/11, calling for a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq).

None of these 24 advisers disowns or regrets the Iraq invasion; few speak of the Palestinians as anything other than terrorists; almost all of them want to increase spending on the US military and they share a Manichaean view of a world in which America is the sole superpower.

Famous five

The Romney campaign is, basically, Neocon Central. Five names on the list of his advisers stand out: Eliot Cohen, Cofer Black, Dan Senor, Eric Edelman and Walid Phares.

Cohen was an adviser to Condoleezza Rice at the state department. In November 2001, he was one of the first neoconservatives to call publicly for a war against Iraq in a column in the *Wall Street Journal* (in which he bombastically described the west's conflict with al-Qaeda and its allies as the start of World War Four).

Black was head of the CIA's counterterrorism centre, where he is alleged to have overseen the introduction of enhanced interrogation techniques (torture) and extraordinary rendition (kidnappings). He went on to work for the Bush administration's favourite private security company, Blackwater. ▾

Senor was a spokesman for the corruption-ridden Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, which disbanded the Iraqi army and then sat idly by as that country descended into a sectarian civil war. Today, he acts as a cheerleader for the Israeli right and is a key backchannel between Romney and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Mitt-Bibi will be the new Reagan- Thatcher, Senor tweeted in April this year.

Edelman is a well-known protégé of Dick Cheney. In 2007, as a Pentagon official in the Bush administration, he accused Hillary Clinton, then a senator, of reinforcing enemy propaganda for daring to ask for information on US troop withdrawals from Iraq.

Phares, a Lebanese-American academic, did not serve under Bush. His claim to fame is as a Fox News terrorism expert who constantly agitates for total war against global jihadism , accuses Democrats of jihadophi - lia and fearmongers about the rise of sharia law in the US. He has been accused of once having been a member of a sectarian Christian militia in Beirut.

Then there is the Romney-Bolton love-in yes, John Bolton. Bush s ex-ambassador to the United Nations may not be an official adviser but he has served as a foreign-affairs proxy for Romney on television and radio and is rumoured to be in line for . . . wait for it . . . the secretary of state s job in a Romney administration. John s wisdom, clarity and courage are qualities that should typify our foreign policy, Romney declared, as he welcomed the mous - tachioed hawk s endorsement of his candidacy in January.

For the record, Bolton has called for Israel to use nuclear weapons against Iran. Yes, nuking Tehran is what passes for wisdom and courage in Romney world.

Despite being discredited and humiliated over Iraq, the zombie neocons are back from the dead. In 2000, neoconservative ideologues such as Paul Wolfowitz and William Kristol alighted on a naive foreign policy neophyte from Texas. In 2012, Bolton, Cohen and Senor hitched the neocon war wagon to a former private-equity magnate from Massachusetts who believes that Syria is Iran s route to the sea .

Remember, Willard Mitt Romney has zero foreign policy experience. A dossier compiled by John McCain s presidential campaign in 2008 noted: Romney s foreign affairs résumé is extremely thin, leading to credibility problems. (The new candidate s über-conservative running mate, Paul Ryan, an austerity-obsessed congressman from Wisconsin, has even less knowledge or experience of the outside world than the Mittster.)

There will be blood

In 2000, left-wing voters, disillusioned at having to choose between a centrist Democrat (Al Gore) and a self-styled compassionate conservative (Bush), voted for the Green Party's Ralph Nader in droves, thereby helping to deliver the White House to the Republican Party . . . and the neocons. Less than three years later, Guantanamo was open for business and Iraq was in flames.

Obama with his drone strikes abroad and assaults on civil liberties at home has been a bitter disappointment but we cannot afford for history to repeat itself. Since the fall of Saddam, pushing for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities has been the neocons *raison d'être*. Obama, for all his faults and flaws, doesn't seek a conflict with Iran; Romney or Team Romney does. If Ohio falls to the Mittster, prepare for a rerun of the blood-spattered Bush years. It is a chilling prospect. My message to US anti-war liberals who say they can't bring themselves to reelect the drone president is this: Obama may not deserve your vote but the rest of the world does not deserve Romney and his gang.

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