

The Star-Ledger

Over the Transom: Declare independence from the neocons this July 4th- and more

By Paul Mulshine

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I'm off for a week and won't be writing my usual column. Instead I'm putting together one of my periodic "Over the Transom" (see [the origins of that term here](#)) compendiums.

In the spirit of the day, which is dedicated to an insurgent group rising up against an oppressive government, let us first consider the most megalomaniacal group to arise in the recent history of the republic.

That would be the so-called "neo" conservatives, the clueless idiots who ignored all the warning from the founders about entangling alliances and got us bogged down in two thoroughly pointless wars.

Their efforts at spreading democracy to Iraq and Syria have put the Islamic extremists in the position of holding big chunks of both countries. It never seems to have occurred to these numbskulls that we should have just left both countries alone. Our enemy is the Islamists, also the natural enemy of the secular fascists who used to run Iraq and still run Syria.

In that regard, read this piece in the New York Times about key neocon Donald Kagan. Kagan comes from a family of armchair generals who have proven themselves to have not the slightest clue about the politics of warfare. He doesn't admit that in the article. But he does admit that he and his fellow travelers are not conservatives:

Mr. Kagan, 55, prefers the term "liberal interventionist" to the neoconservative label, but believes the latter no longer has the stigma it did in the early days of the Obama presidency. "The sort of desire to say 'Neocon! Neocon! Neocon!' has moved out a little bit to the fringe," he said.

Both Mr. Kagan and his brother are taking considerable pains to describe their advocacy as broadly bipartisan. "The urgent priority is to unite internationalists on both sides of the spectrum," said Fred Kagan, while his brother, Robert, mentioned his briefing of a bipartisan congressional delegation at Davos and his good relations with top White House officials, including the national security adviser, Susan E. Rice.

Kagan got everything else wrong, but he sure got that right. Do you think it was a good idea for George W. Bush to bring freedom and democracy to a bunch of people who hate us?

Guess what? You're a liberal, too.

But there aren't many of you left if my chats with my fellow right-wingers are any indication. Mired as he is inside the Beltway, Kagan has not the slightest way of determining that it's he and his fellow neocons who are on the fringe - the lunatic fringe at that.

Out here in the real America, conservatives are fed up with this crap - whether you call it "neoconservative" or "liberal internationalist" or - my favorite - [Trotskyist](#).

Anyway, it's hard to read about this flabby laptop warrior calling for a "more muscular" foreign policy without laughing. As I've noted before, the current division on foreign policy is not between left and right so much as between realists and fantasists. A key realist is Pat Buchanan. He predicted this Iraq adventure would go wrong long before President Bush invaded.

I'm talking about the first president Bush. Read this exchange with the liberal Democratic Congressman Stephen Solarz of New York in the aftermath of an invasion in 1991 that led directly to the current quagmire. Buchanan had asked Solarz how to handle the Sunni-Shiite fighting that followed the U.S. attack.

Buchanan had predicted that before the war. He noted that some had now suggested assassinating Saddam to get out of what Buchanan called the "quagmire." He asked Solarz what he would do. Note the goofy optimism of the New York congressman as against the harsh realism of Buchanan:

Rep. SOLARZ: First of all, I don't think that solves the problem because the problem goes way beyond Saddam Hussein himself. It includes the Ba'athist regime which he leads. If all we did was get rid of him but left his subordinate tormentors in power, I think we would have accomplished relatively little. The object is to replace the regime and to make possible the establishment of a new government in Iraq representing all sectors of Iraqi society-

BUCHANAN: What you're talking about is a World War II type victory. We go to Berlin we de-Nazify the whole country, we hold elections, we occupy it. Do you think the American people are ready for that? These guys are coming home to welcomes and the Americans are saying, we won, goodbye and good luck.

Rep. SOLARZ: World War II took us four years to win. If we together with our coalition partners announce that we were prepared to use force to drive Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime from power, it would be over probably in four days, no more than four weeks. They may have the power to crush their own people but as we demonstrated in Kuwait, they don't have the ability to resist the coalition. They will-

BUCHANAN: You are talking about the occupation of a city about the size of Los Angeles with four million people.

Rep. SOLARZ: But not by the United States because if we succeed in bringing down the regime and establishing a temporary U.N. administration we'd use Arabic and Islamic countries to constitute the peace keeping force that would preserve order in that country until such time as a broadly based Iraqi government is established.

It's now clear that Pat won that argument. Anyway, enough of these characters. Let us hereby celebrate our independence from them. Never has anyone screwed up foreign policy as completely.

On to another amusing topic. Speaking of clueless Republicans from the old WASP establishment who held power in the 1990s, here's [a piece about Christie Whitman's latest effort](#) to prove she knows not a thing about the science behind global-warming alarmism:

Whitman was administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President George W. Bush, and she joined three other former EPA leaders who served under Republican presidents to testify at a recent Senate hearing in support of regulations to curb climate change.

Their goal, Whitman said in an interview afterward, was to provide cover to Republicans looking for an opportunity to agree with them.

“Having a former Republican appointee step up and say it’s time to take action, it will give them some chance of comfort and ability to move forward,” Whitman said.

Back in 2001, just after the second President Bush made the mistake of naming her as his Environmental Protection head, Whitman committed a gaffe that showed she didn't understand the difference between CO-2 and CFCs. Here's what I wrote about it at the time:

When it comes to atmospheric pollution, Christie's a bit of an airhead, said Jerry Taylor of the Cato Institute. He directed me to look up Whitman's response to a New York Times reporter's question about global warming at the time of her nomination to the EPA.

"Clearly there's a hole in the ozone, that has been identified. But I saw a study the other day that showed that that was closing," she told the Times.

When informed by the reporter that she was talking about the wrong issue, Whitman refused to

acknowledge her mistake. She insisted the greenhouse effect and the ozone layer are interrelated. Which they are, but only in the sense that both take place up there in the sky. As one environmentalist put it, "That's a little bit like the Treasury secretary being asked about currency fluctuations and answering about interest rates."

Whitman went on to a tenure at the agency that was, to put it politely, undistinguished. Meanwhile she failed to finish out her second term as governor, handing the power to the political hacks then running the Republican Party. They promptly rushed out and passed a hike in public employee pensions that helped bu the current governor named Christie in a hole he's still trying to climb out of.

Chris Christie is getting a lot of heat for failing to make that major contribution to the pension fund demanded by the unions that he promised. But as I've noted, it's our money what was promised, not his. And the unions passed up a chance to ask us voters whether we would guarantee their pensions. So they have no right to complain.

Meanwhile check Christie's current pronouncement on pensions:

He's right. The era of defined-benefit pensions is over and the public employees need to adjust to it. Every time I hear of a teacher retiring with a big pension at 56 or so I get to thinking of the nuns who taught us well into their '80s.

Teaching does not involve physical labor. Nor do most public jobs. As for those that do, big deal. I know lots of guy in their 50s doing masonry, mechanical work and carpentry. They can't retired in their 50s and their tax dollars shouldn't be paying for others to do so.

And then finally there's this return to my original theme of boating.

Check the photo below of the sun setting over Assunpink Lake, an absolutely beautiful spot where I often stop on my way home from Trenton so I can go for a run.

The sun sets over the lake in the Assunpink Wildlife Refuge. Paul Mulshine

After my run, I took out my I-phone and shot the above photo.

Doesn't it look peaceful? Idyllic? Bucolic? And so on?

Guess what? The second after I shot it, the fisherman on the dock began screaming at the fishermen in the boat over some imagined offense. Apparently they ran over his line or something. I could hardly tell from all the F-bombs hurled in each direction.

A summer sunset in Jersey: There's just nothing like it!