



Donald Trump's final foe: Is Ted Cruz a conservative, a neocon or a conniver?

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By the time the votes are counted this evening, the Republican presidential primary will likely become a two-man race.

One of those men has been subjected to scrutiny of the most detailed sort. But what of the other?

Till now, Texas Senator Ted Cruz was just part of the pack chasing Donald Trump. That meant Cruz could get away with political positions that seemed calculated to please many and displease few.

I'm not talking about domestic politics. There was little difference between the two when this race began and there's even less now that Cruz is parroting Trump's stands on immigration and trade.

I'm talking about foreign policy. Is Cruz a conservative non-interventionist in the Ron Paul/Pat Buchanan mold?

Or is he a nation-building "neo" conservative interventionist in the John McCain/Lindsey Graham mold?

It's hard to tell. Take the 2003 Iraq invasion. Just a year into that war, Trump had already accurately diagnosed why that exercise in nation-building was doomed.

"I would never have handled it that way," he said in an interview with Esquire Magazine. "Does anybody really believe that Iraq is going to be a wonderful democracy where people are going to run down to the voting box and gently put in their ballot and the winner is happily going to step up to lead the county?"

In fact, the entire Republican Party establishment believed that back then. So score one for Trump.

As for Cruz, he also denounced the Iraq War as a debacle. But he waited till last year.

Prior to that Cruz sounded a lot like McCain and Graham. In the 2012 confirmation hearings for Chuck Hagel as defense secretary, a big issue was the former senator's skepticism about the Iraq War. Cruz joined those two in piling on Hagel. At one point Cruz, who never served in the military, even attacked the Vietnam War vet as "very prominently anti-U.S."

Defense expert Chris Preble of the free-market Cato Institute was watching those hearings closely. When I called him yesterday, he recalled that Cruz seemed to be buying into the flawed vision of McCain and Graham.

"Quite literally there's something wrong with the way these people process information," said Preble. "When the interventions they advocated went poorly, they weren't capable of learning from this. They want to be judged on their intentions, not their results."

Ted Cruz went over the line with his comments on Trump

Ted Cruz started out sounding like a real right-winger, but his comments on the disruption of that Donald Trump rally are just the latest example of his pandering to the establishment

As for Cruz, he wanted to be on both sides in this debate, said Preble.

"I think Cruz has tried to straddle the fence," he said. "I think he's trying to strike the middle ground between John McCain interventionism and Ron Paul non-interventionism."

That's like looking for the middle ground between the North America and Europe. Of late, Cruz has been sailing for the neocon shore.

In the most recent debate, for example, Cruz attacked Trump for his statement that he would remain neutral in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Trump stuck to his position that "I would like to at least have the other side think I'm somewhat neutral as to them, so that we can maybe get a deal done."

Then there's the Iran nuke deal, which Cruz has promised to rip it up on his first day in office.

This is a position soothing to the neocon side. But when I bounced it off a professor at Cruz's alma mater Princeton, Frank von Hippel said it's a bad idea.

"If the Iranians were smart, they would continue to comply with the agreement and watch the rest of the world thumb its nose at the U.S. trying to reestablish sanctions," said the noted expert on nuclear nonproliferation.

Or perhaps they might just turn all those centrifuges back on and pick up where they left off, he said. Either way, that would be bad for the U.S.

Von Hippel said that the next president would be better off letting the Iranians continue dismantling their centrifuges and focus on amending the treaty so that Iran can't bring centrifuges back on line in 2025.

That of course is much closer to Trump's position, which is his position on just about everything: He'll make a better deal.

And then there are Cruz's calls for "carpet-bombing" the Islamic State. It's hard to make the Donald look like the sane, responsible adult in the discussion, but Cruz is managing to do so.

That lost him the support of Ron Paul, who endorsed Cruz in his 2012 Senate run. But in a recent interview with Fox News, Paul made it plain he doesn't back his fellow Texan for president.

"He and Hillary have more in common than we have with Trump or anyone else," Paul said.

Meanwhile arch-neocon Bill Kristol weighed in.

"I think at the end of the day a Ted Cruz administration would follow a foreign policy that I would be pretty happy with," he said.

That certainly seems to clear things up.

Now back to the show.

And listen to the argument about how the U.S. should be the nanny to the rest of the world. Cruz doesn't leave much doubt he's a neocon to his core.

At a certain point, you have to conclude this guy will say anything to get elected.

And then there's this remark he made about Hagel:

* Within weeks of being sworn in, Cruz questioned whether Chuck Hagel, a Vietnam-era war hero and former Republican senator from Nebraska up for confirmation as defense secretary, might have been paid off by the North Korean or Saudi governments. Democrats pounced, with some labeling Cruz's line of questioning a McCarthyite smear. Many Republicans cringed. Cruz would later write in his book that naming North Korea was a tactical error.