



Where the Neocons Went, Rubio Is Following

By: Justin Logan – March 26, 2013

The Republican Party has admitted it has a problem. Something has to change to restore the party to a place where it might be able to get one of its own elected president.

Senator Rand Paul, R-KY., has made clear that he agrees. Paul is focusing on the "things we need to do to be competitive on the West Coast, to be competitive in New England and Illinois."

But Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., apparently thinks the way to get the GOP back into power is to move it backward—back to the Republican Party of Dick Cheney and John Yoo. Yesterday, Rubio traveled to Paul's home state to suggest that Paul is an "isolationist," and that:

We can't solve every humanitarian crisis on the planet, we can't be involved in every dispute, every civil war and every conflict. But we also cannot retreat from the world. It's not that America will continue to function as the world's police officer. The problem is that like anything in the world: If you pull back from it, a vacuum will be created... The alternative to U.S. [engagement] on the global stage is chaos.

Mouthing another neoconservative slogan, Rubio pronounced—ahistorically—that "Every single time that nations have retreated from the world, every single time this nation has retreated from the world, we have paid for it in the long run. We have paid for it dearly."

As Daniel Larison points out, it isn't clear which "retreats" Rubio was thinking of, but a few that call into question his argument would be Vietnam, Iraq, and hopefully someday Afghanistan. Whatever "dear" costs Rubio thinks we incurred by extricating ourselves from those wars, they pale in comparison to the American corpses and squandered trillions of getting into them.

Larison also notes that "since he has been in the Senate, Rubio has made a point of getting on the more hawkish or assertive side of every foreign policy debate." That reality—that promises he isn't hawkish on every issue in theory, but he is in practice—seems like cold comfort.

It's also worth moving down from this high level of abstraction to more practical considerations, and here it becomes clear that Rubio looks, walks, and quacks like a dyed-in-the-wool neocon. If the Bush years taught us anything, it is that personnel are policy. The people staffing the Rumsfeld Pentagon and the Bush National Security Council made invading Iraq a foregone conclusion. When you surround yourself with people of a particular view, the information you get skews a particular way. So whom has Rubio brought in to advise him on foreign policy issues?

Jamie Fly, the former head of Bill Kristol's neoconservative "Foreign Policy Initiative" think tank. In announcing the hire, Rubio declared that Fly "brings great experience to the office, and will be a valuable addition to our team as we look forward to the year ahead. Our nation is facing serious challenges around the globe, and it's critical that we do everything we can this Congress to ensure that America remains a leader in the world."

And Fly's experience immediately preceding his hire by Rubio has been promoting neoconservative policies like bombing Iran until its government collapses. He argued this in a coauthored *Foreign Affairs* piece, as well as in his remarks at a Cato Institute event I hosted on Iran.

So let's be clear here: beyond airy abstractions about "leadership" and "retreat," Rubio is drawn to, and informed by, neoconservative ideas. When he says "leadership," people should read that as "bombing Iran."

This is one aspect of the choice before the Republican Party: taking Paul's advice and rediscovering that conservatism doesn't mean trying to run the world with the U.S. military, or taking Rubio's advice and turning the reins back over to the neocons.