



[Leon T. Hadar](#)

Journalist and foreign affairs analyst

Posted: October 2, 2009 03:33 PM

Obama Should Adopt the "Public Option" in Afghanistan

Read More: [Afghanistan War](#), [Bush](#), [Conservatives](#), [Democrats](#), [Foreign Policy](#), [Foreign Policy Elites](#), [Hillary Clinton](#), [Iraq War](#), [John McCain](#), [Neoconservatives](#), [President Barack Obama](#), [President George W.](#), [Republicans](#), [Stanley McChrystal](#), [The Surge](#), [Tim Geithner](#), [Vietnam War](#), [Walter Lippmann](#), [Washington Post](#), [Politics News](#)
What's Your Reaction?



[Amazing](#) [Inspiring](#) [Funny](#) [Scary](#) [Hot](#) [Crazy](#) [Important](#) [Weird](#)

[Be the First to Submit This Story to Digg](#)



Get Breaking News Alerts

never spam

- [Share](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Comments](#)

Political thinkers like Walter Lippmann have concluded that the American voters were largely ignorant about foreign policy and lacked the competence to make critical choices about war and peace, and required the guidance of experts, specialists and bureaucrats, the so-called foreign policy elites. But the notion that this governing class would have a free-hand in pursuing U.S. interest abroad was shattered during the Vietnam War. Policymakers in Washington discovered that U.S. Presidents could not pursue costly military objectives abroad without securing the consent of the American people. The public was willing to leave foreign affairs to the professionals -- until, that is, they conclude that things are seriously off track and the costs in terms of life and treasury are becoming unbearable.

So it was not surprising that following the Democratic sweep of the 2006 elections, which was regarded as a referendum on the Iraq War, the conventional wisdom suggested that the outcome of the midterm races amounted to revoking President George W. Bush's license to kill. Indeed, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News opinion poll, a substantial majority of Americans wanted to bring to an end the war in Iraq and expected the White House to move in that direction.

That the former president could ignore the clear message coming out of the 2006 midterm -- that he had lost his mandate "to stay the course" in Iraq -- launching the military "surge" in Iraq, reflected a startling political reality in Washington. The decision on whether Americans would go to war -- or in the case of the "surge," to continue fighting in a war -- was made by members of an informal axis of players in the bureaucracy, media, interest groups and the think tanks that have been successful in resisting the public opposition to the war. This small group of retired and active military officers, government bureaucrats and think tank analysts, working together with key lawmakers -- all of whom had been cheerleaders for the U.S. invasion of Iraq -- were able to push through a new plan for the war against opposition across the political spectrum, and through that political-bureaucratic "surge" to circumvent the intent of public. It was another depressing chapter -- "Bush to the American People: Drop Dead (in Iraq)" -- in the narrative of the Imperial Presidency: "Bush to the American People: Drop Dead (in Iraq)."

No one seriously expected that President Barack Obama would try either to demolish the foundations of the Imperial Presidency or to deny members of the foreign policy establishment access to his policy-making apparatus. That Obama selected Hillary Clinton as his chief diplomat and continued to employ Republican national security "insider" Robert Gates as his Defense Secretary were clear indications that the elites would still be running the national security state and dispensing goodies (jobs and cash) to their favorite clients at home and abroad (in the same way that choosing Wall Street "insider" Tim Geithner as Treasury Secretary was supposed to reassure our distressed investment bankers). That's called "continuity."

It does make political and bureaucratic sense for a young and inexperienced president to not annoy the Pentagon chiefs, to make the guys at the CIA happy and to not provide too many opportunities for John Bolton and other noisy neocons to charge you with "defeatism." You certainly don't want to irritate mainstream foreign policy pundits who tend to reflect the views of the elites that inhabit the bureaucracy, congressional staffs, and think tanks, etc. and who don't like too much "change," especially the kind of change that erodes their influence. More specifically, they get uncomfortable with a White House that doesn't share their knee-jerk response -- projecting American global leadership a.k.a. U.S. intervention in every foreign crisis ASAP -- and interpret that kind of presidential caution as weakness, if not -- Heavens Forbid -- Isolationism!

Candidate Obama, however, had also promised a foreign policy "change" during his campaign, the sort of realism in the global arena that the majority of Americans seemed to support. And overall, President Obama has been doing a good job in juggling "continuity" and "change."

But now it looks as though President Obama could have difficulties in pursuing this delicate foreign policy act. The majority of Americans now see the war in Afghanistan as not worth fighting, according to a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll, and just a quarter say more U.S. troops should be sent to the country.

So Obama, not unlike his predecessor in 2006, is now coming under enormous public pressure to bring an end to a costly U.S. intervention in a bloody war in the Great Middle East, and not unlike in 2006, the elites in Washington -- ranging from U.S. General Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, to the editorial page of the Washington Post, backed by many of the experts in both Republican and Democratic leaning think tanks -- are providing him with the same gadget they had handed to Bush in 2006 -- a military "surge" -- that would allow Washington to continue fighting in the mountains of Hindu-Kush for many years to come.

From the perspective of the "surgers" in Washington, leaking McChrystal's report to the Washington Post was considered to be the first shot in a political war against Obama. It was an implied threat: If you dare reject our advice, well, there is going to be a political-media backlash that would make the Deathers' anti-health care campaign look like a picnic.

Follow Leon T. Hadar on Twitter: www.twitter.com/leonhadar

What's Your Reaction?
Amazing Inspiring Funny Scary Hot Crazy Important Weird

More in Politics...

- McCain Campaign Manager: Palin In 2012 Would...
White House Eyeing Narrower War Effort In...
It's Not Just ACORN, Says Congressman Grayson
Obama, McChrystal Meet In Denmark Over Afghan...

Comments 0 Pending Comments 0

FAQ: Comments and Moderation FAQ: HuffPost Accounts
Post Comment



Want to reply to a comment? Hint: Click "Reply" at the bottom of the comment; after being approved your comment will appear directly underneath the comment you replied to

View Comments: Newest First Expand All



You must be logged in to comment. Log in or connect with



SEARCH



- Copyright © 2009 HuffingtonPost.com, Inc. |
Archive |
User Agreement |
Privacy |
Comment Policy |
About Us |
Powered by Movable Type