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Republicans Finally Divide Over Neocon Rx Of Permanent War

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By Scott McConnell

The intraconservative squabble which erupted after GOP chairman Michael Steele's criticism of the Afghan war bears watching. Steele is a loose cannon, and hardly known as a fount of foreign policy wisdom. But he is almost certainly right about the unwinnability of the American war Afghanistan. Bill Kristol and Liz Cheney's call for his resignation was predictable enough: for the neocons, questioning of the war must be immediately stamped out—lest it spread to a questioning of other wars, particularly the one they are hoping for in Iran.

Iraq war opponents Pat Buchanan and Ron Paul defended the embattled Steele. More surprising was Ann Coulter, generally a hawkish, over the top, right wing performance artist highly popular in the GOP activist base. In her defense of Steele, she opened with a barrage of right wing boilerplate but eventually got to wondering where it was mandated that Republicans had to be for permanent war. By the end, she was calling Kristol and Liz Cheney to resign, from what it wasn't clear. Coulter received some support from the blog of eclectic conservative New York Post columnist Robert A. George, and had some (to me surprising) defenders on David Horowitz's website. On the other side David Frum sought to purge Coulter from the ranks of acceptable conservatives.

Essentially the polemics reveal that that the neocons don't have the Republican party and the conservative base sewed up. Coulter wouldn't have spoken out unless she sensed she would have had some right wing support—she appears crazy in some ways (or at least markets herself that way) but has an excellent sense of what plays on the Right. Her dissent isn't the only encouraging sign. In recent months, Glenn Beck has given platforms to realists like the Cato Institute's Justin Logan and, frequently, to Ron Paul. It's an old story, the neocons like to believe they had silenced all Republican opposition, but it keeps coming back, in different form.

The antiwar tendencies are too haphazard to have a name: to call them dissident or isolationist would be inexact, and realist would give them more credit than they have earned. But it is now beginning to emerge that not all Republicans concur with the neocon plan for permanent war. The Afghanistan debate has weighty implications for Iran—at the very least it is a foreshadowing of the Iran debate Liz Cheney and Kristol hope never takes place in the Republican party. And of course it relates to Israel/Palestine, as well, as the ignition of an American war on Iran is perhaps Netanyahu's first diplomatic priority. Part of the background comes from the fact that GOP is less beholden financially to the Israel lobby than the Dems, and historically some Republican presidents have shown far more moxie in dealing with Israel than their Democratic counterparts. If they wanted to, Republicans could go their own

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way. You can see why Frum and Kristol are nervous.

Mondoweiss

Mondoweiss is a news website devoted to covering American foreign policy in the Middle East, chiefly from a progressive Jewish perspective. Mondoweiss is maintained by Philip Weiss and Adam Horowitz. Weiss is 54 and lives in New York state. Horowitz is 36 and lives in New York City.

Mondoweiss has four principal aims:

1. To publish important developments touching on Israel/Palestine, the American Jewish community and the shifting debate over US foreign policy in a timely fashion;
2. To publish a diversity of voices to promote dialogue on these important issues;
3. To foster the movement for greater fairness and justice for Palestinians in American foreign policy;
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