



# POLITICO

## Arena Digest: Obama vs. Cheney

By: [Fred Barbash](#)

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### **Thomas J. Whalen, professor, Boston University**

“The real difference revealed in the Obama vs. Cheney public showdown is that the president is the true conservative of the two. He stands firmly for the rule of law and the sanctity of individual rights over those of the state. Cheney is the radical here. He would have Americans believe that public concerns involving the routine suspension of habeas corpus and the use of physical torture in prisoner interrogations are ‘utterly misplaced.’ In his mind, the ends justify the means. This kind of morally retrograde thinking may fly in a banana republic but not in the world’s oldest and most enduring representative democracy.”

### **Stephen Hess, Brookings Institution**

“For all those who teach, study or simply care about rhetoric, Obama vs. Cheney is a classic lesson in swordplay: The saber challenges the epee. Two masters. Two totally different choices of weapons. The debate will be which was the most appropriate for this situation.”

### **Ross Baker, professor, Rutgers University**

“Obama may be thinking philosophy, but Cheney is operating in the realm of tactics. Cheney is not so much interested in protecting the reputation of the Bush administration as he is in using a time-tested weapon on the Democrats: that they are undependable stewards of national security. It goes back at least as far as FDR, who was attacked for the sellout of Poland at Yalta and then again with Harry Truman and ‘Who lost China?’ Spiro Agnew summed it up with memorable eloquence when he accused Hubert Humphrey of being ‘squishy soft on communism.’ The national security issue has been an electrified third rail of American politics fully as much as Social Security has high-voltaged the GOP. Obama may be thinking philosophy, but Cheney is operating in the realm of tactics.”

### **Stephen M. Walt, professor, Harvard University**

“The real difference? Simple. President Obama appealed to our sense of reason and our hopes for the future. I disagree with some of his conclusions, but it is refreshing to see a public official grapple with difficult issues in a sophisticated way. Cheney appealed to our sense of fear and counted on his listeners having forgotten what actually did and did not happen on his watch. Obama is encouraging us to live up to our highest ideals; Cheney wants us to base policy on our darkest instincts.”

### **David Boaz, executive vice president, Cato Institute**

“Obama is closer to Bush-Cheney than either side wants to admit, as Jack Goldsmith notes. He’s keeping a lot of Bush’s illiberal policies on detention, surveillance and habeas corpus. And perhaps unsurprisingly, President Obama seems decidedly less enthusiastic about rolling back the executive powers accumulated during the Bush years than candidate Obama did.”

**Maria Cardona, Democratic strategist**

“What’s the real difference? That’s simple. Everything. I know there have been numerous opinions written and expressed about how Obama is just continuing the same old policies of his predecessors, blah, blah, blah. The truth is, nothing could be further from the truth. President Obama and this administration have a fundamentally different way of looking at the world and of their treatment of the American public.”

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