

Assessing the Republican Party Platform

By [Prof. Stephen Zunes](#)

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While the foreign policy segments of the Democratic Party platform as outlined in my most recent article is disappointing in many respects, the Republican Party platform is downright scary.

Among the more frightening aspects of the platform is its unconstitutional assertion that the president has sole prerogative to make decisions on matters of war, rejecting any role for Congressional "interference" in foreign policy matters. This appears to be a pre-emptive assertion by the Republican Party that, in the event of a John McCain win in November, they would reject any attempt by the likely Democratic-controlled Congress to impose any checks and balances to prevent a possible war on Iran or other dangerous executive initiatives. The Republican platform calls for the development and deployment of both national and theater missile-defense systems. These incredibly expensive weapons systems, which are unlikely to work in any case, violate arms-control agreements signed and ratified under the Nixon administration. Also disturbing is the platform's classification of immigration as a national security issue, which has serious ramifications in terms of the nature of legislation and enforcement. It also claims that warrantless wiretapping of American citizens is "vital" to America's national security. And, despite the Clinton administration's increases in the already bloated military budget after the end of the Cold War, the Republican platform insists that "national defense was neglected and under-funded by the Clinton Administration." The platform then calls for a significant increase in the size of the American armed forces, even though the United States – at barely 4% of the world's population – already accounts for over one-half of the world's military spending.

Attacking the United Nations Nearly a full quarter of the foreign policy segment of the Republican platform is devoted to attacking the United Nations and international law. The party of the most scandal-ridden and corrupt administration in modern U.S. history ironically attacks the UN as "scandal-ridden and corrupt." It condemns the UN for alleged discrimination against Israel, apparently for its insistence that Israel comply with international humanitarian law. And the platform applauds the successful U.S. effort to have Israel included in the UN's regional grouping of Western European nations although Israel is located in the Middle East. In apparent reference to unsuccessful efforts by the international community to insist that the United States and Great Britain comply by the UN charter and not launch their illegal invasion of Iraq, the platform insists that the UN should not "prevent our joining with other democracies to protect our vital national interests." In peacekeeping operations, while maintaining that Americans should be able to command armed forces of other countries, the platform asserts that "as a matter of U.S. sovereignty, American forces must remain under American command." The platform rejects the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), designed to prosecute war criminals such as the Sudanese leaders responsible for the genocidal war in Darfur, claiming that it would somehow limit the ability of the United States to "act abroad to meet global security

requirements.” The platform goes so far as to back legislation punishing other countries that do not ratify the ICC agreement. Such legislation would authorize the president to use military force against countries – such as the Netherlands, where the ICC is located – that detain citizens of the United States or allied nations held by or on behalf of the ICC. The platform also rejects the Law of the Sea Treaty, which defines the rights and responsibilities of the world’s nations in their use of the planet’s oceans, establishing guidelines for environmental protection and the management of marine natural resources. The treaty has been ratified by 80% of the world’s nations. The platform condemns the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as “radical social engineering” that fails to “respect the fundamental institutions of marriage and family.” The United States is currently the only country besides Somalia – notorious for its use of child soldiers – that has refused to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It strongly affirms the Bush administration policy of not supporting UN programs that fund family planning or other women’s health work as long as any of the funds go to any non-governmental organization that, even in activities totally unrelated to the UN-funded programs, engages in any work related to abortions.

The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan The Republican platform calls for nothing less than an outright “military victory” in Iraq, something which has alluded the United States for over five years despite its overwhelming military might. As the Bush administration has claimed every year since the 2003 U.S. invasion, “A stable, unified, and democratic Iraqi nation is within reach.” Yet, despite the relative lull in violence in recent months, such a scenario appears to be as far from reality as ever. The platform rejects any timetables for a U.S. withdrawal. Despite the ruling Iraqi coalition’s domination by sectarian fundamentalist Shia parties and their militias, the platform argues that continuing to sacrifice American lives and dollars to keep that regime in power would somehow “give us a strategic ally in the struggle against extremism.” Using language remarkable similar to that of the Nixon administration in its defense of policies that needlessly and tragically prolonged the war in Vietnam, the platform insists that “To those who have sacrificed so much, we owe the commitment that American forces will leave that country in victory and with honor.” The Republican platform claims that a military victory in Iraq is necessary in order to “deny al-Qaeda a safe haven” and “limit Iranian influence in the Middle East.” But al-Qaeda had no safe haven in Iraq and Iran had virtually no influence in Iraq until the Republican administration invaded Iraq and overthrew its government, which had until then successfully suppressed both pro-Iranian elements as well as radical Sunnis who could potentially align with al-Qaeda. By claiming that victory is in reach, however, the platform prepares the ground for blaming all subsequent terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda affiliates and ongoing Iranian influence in the Middle East on the Democrats for not “finishing the job” in Iraq should they win in November. Despite ongoing reversals in Afghanistan in the face of a resurgent Taliban, the Republican platform claims that “there has been great progress” in that country. By rejecting “the Democratic Party’s idea that America can succeed in Afghanistan only by failure in Iraq,” the platform equates the redeployment of troops from Iraq to Afghanistan as surrender.

Other Middle Eastern Issues The Republican platform singles out the Kingdom of Morocco for its “cooperation and social and economic development” even though Morocco continues its illegal occupation of Western Sahara and brutal suppression of nonviolent pro-independence activists. The family dictatorships of the Arabian peninsula are given similar praise and, despite their ongoing oppression of women, are validated for their progress “especially with regard to the rights of women.” The platform claims that these monarchies, despite their recent ties to the Taliban and other Islamic extremists, “deserve our appreciation and

assistance” for their supposed support in “the war on terror.” In contrast to those suffering under repressive U.S.-backed regimes in the Gulf region, the Republican platform expresses its support for “the people of Iran who seek peace and aspire to freedom” and “have a right to choose their own government.” Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans killed in Iraq have died at the hands of Baathist, Salafi Sunni, and other anti-Iranian guerrillas, the platform claims that it is Iran that “provides weapons that are killing our troops in Iraq.” Though the United States has, in recent years, invaded two countries bordering Iran, the platform claims that it is Iran which “threatens its neighbors.” And, despite a lack of opposition to the nuclear weapons arsenals of India, Israel, and Pakistan, the platform declares that the United States “will not allow the current regime in Tehran to develop nuclear weapons.” The platform rejects Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama’s proposals to negotiate with the Iranians and calls for stricter sanctions against that country. The Republicans also call for stricter sanctions against foreign companies doing business with Iran, even though such restrictions against private third-party entities directly violates provisions of the World Trade Organization that the United States insists on upholding in other contexts. More ominously, using hyperbolic language similar to that of the current Republican administration in justifying the invasion of Iraq six years ago, the Republican platform insists that “the U.S. must retain all options in dealing with a situation that gravely threatens our security, our interests, and the safety of our friends.” Despite the withdrawal of Syrian forces and the end of Syria’s de facto control of the Lebanese government as a result of the nonviolent Cedar Revolution of 2004, the platform insists that Lebanon is neither independent nor sovereign. This language serves as a possible justification for future Israeli incursions into that country. Despite the Republicans’ support of Israel’s 1978-2000 occupation of southern Lebanon in violation of no less than 10 UN Security Council resolutions as well as its renunciation of the UN’s authority to uphold international law elsewhere in the document, the platform calls for “the full implementation of all UN resolutions concerning that country,” presumably in reference to those calling for the disarmament of militia which had fought off previous U.S.-backed Israeli assaults on Lebanon. The Republican platform goes on record defending Israeli attacks against populated Lebanese and Palestinian areas as legitimate acts of self-defense; insists that Jerusalem be the undivided capital of Israel (but not of Palestine) and that the United States break with other nations by moving its embassy there; that there be no timetables or pressure on Israel to find a resolution in negotiations with the Palestinians; and that a final peace agreement be based upon “changes that reflect today’s realities,” presumably meaning Palestinian acceptance of the large-scale Israeli colonization of the occupied West Bank.

Latin America and Africa The platform strongly endorses the proposed free-trade agreement with Colombia. It claims that Democratic Party opposition to the agreement is based not on concerns over the widespread repression by the Colombian regime and allied right-wing paramilitaries of labor activists and others, but because of pressure from “union bosses.” The platform also refers to the Colombian regime, which has been repeatedly condemned by human rights groups for its gross and systematic human rights abuses, as “a courageous ally.” Though silent on far greater human rights abuses by U.S. allies, the platform singles out the government of Cuba for criticism for oppressing its people and holding political prisoners. It calls for continuing strict trade sanctions and the ban on Americans traveling to that socialist country. The platform endorses the work of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which is dedicated to hastening Cuba’s transition to a free-market economy. It also calls for “a dedicated platform for transmission of Radio and Television Martí into Cuba,” presumably meaning flying aircraft with radio and television transmitters just north

of the island to broadcast propaganda from right-wing Cuban exiles based in Miami. Similarly, the platform notes how the “promise of democracy and freedom in Africa is diminished by the government of Zimbabwe,” citing the repression of the Mugabe regime, and the violence and intimidation that has made free and fair elections impossible. However, there is no mention of Equatorial Guinea, Swaziland, Congo, Cameroon, Togo, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Rwanda, Gabon, Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia, or any other U.S.-backed regimes in Africa that engage in similar repression. While supporting sanctions against Zimbabwe, which have thus far been unsuccessful, the platform fails to consider simply withholding U.S. military aid and economic support for these other dictatorships.

More of the Same As this platform indicates, should the Republicans win in November, U.S. foreign policy will continue in its unilateralist and militaristic direction, with little regard for international law and human rights except for their highly selective application to advance U.S. policy goals. While the Democratic platform is disturbingly similar to that of the Republicans in a number of areas – particularly regarding Israel, Afghanistan, and military spending – it parts company with the Republican Party’s emphasis on military solutions to complex political problems and American exceptionalism within the community of nations. Most Americans see the domestic economy as the primary concern this election season. Nevertheless, the Democrats would do well to highlight their differences with the Republicans on foreign policy issues. After all, public opinion polls indicate that on most of the issues highlighted above the incumbent party appears to be out of sync with the majority of American voters.

Stephen Zunes is a professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco and a senior analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus.

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