

Candidate McCain: A Risky Choice

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“I believe that the Iraqi people will greet us as liberators.” Sen. John McCain, (March 20, 2003)

“As you know, there are al Qaeda operatives that are taken back into Iran, given training as leaders, and they’re moving back into Iraq.” Sen. John McCain, 2008 presumptive Republican presidential nominee, (In Amman, Jordan, March 18, 2008)

“Iran obviously is on the path toward acquiring nuclear weapons.” ...“At the end of the day we cannot allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon.” Sen. John McCain

“Anyone who worries about how long we [the United States]’re in Iraq does not understand the military.” Sen. John McCain

“John McCain will make [Dick] Cheney look like Gandhi.” Pat Buchanan.

“McCain was a fighter pilot, who dropped laser-guided missiles from 35,000 feet. He was long gone when they hit. What happened when they [the missiles] get to the ground? He doesn’t know. You have to care about the lives of people. McCain never gets into those issues.” Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.)

Many people write to me asking what I think of the current batch of presidential candidates in the U.S. —First, let me make a general observation. The American political process, especially at the presidential level, is inhuman and inefficient. It is a gruesome meat grinder where candidates have to campaign for months in primaries or caucuses in all 50 states, raise tens of millions dollars and see their private lives exposed and criticized. With such a system, it is no wonder that few Americans with high intellect and character are willing to submit themselves to such an ordeal. The current batch of presidential candidates is the result of such a system. You will find no great personalities of the caliber of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower or John F. Kennedy, even though the more nutty ones have been eliminated. The three remaining candidates are not the best of what America can offer and afford.

Let me begin with the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Senator John McCain (R-AZ). My appreciation is, on the whole, relatively negative.

On the positive side, Senator McCain has built a long history of independence in the U.S. Senate, so much so that he is often referred to as a maverick. For example, Sen. McCain has displeased many Republicans by supporting political finance reform, by denouncing state torture and even by criticizing initially the way the Bush-Cheney administration launched the

Iraq war. On the last issue, however, it can be said that Sen. McCain has since backed off and he has aligned himself more closely with the current Republican White House.

On the question of torture, Sen. McCain has promised to close the detention center in Guantanamo Bay. He has declared that he would engage more actively in climate talks (as long as China and India agreed to emissions cuts). It can also be said that Sen. McCain does not consider himself a “religious” candidate, and I doubt very much that he will be holding weekly Bible sessions, as George W. Bush is reported having done within the walls of the White House. These may be inconsequential differences with the current administration, but I think they are real.

On the negative side, however, the issues on which Sen. McCain agrees with President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are much more numerous and much more important. On most of the important issues, it would be “more of the same” with John McCain. That is why President George W. Bush has said that he is ready to do anything to have Senator John McCain elected president and that he is going to raise funds for him. Bush knows perfectly well that a McCain presidency would be like a third term for his own failed presidency. Indeed, people who like what Bush has done or undone during the last eight years should vote for McCain with little fear of being disappointed. In particular, they would love his militarism and his bellicose character. On the other hand, those who have felt betrayed or have been the victims of the Bush-Cheney administration, and that includes the 81 percent of Americans who believe their country is on the wrong track, should think twice before de facto extending the disastrous Bush presidency one day further than necessary.

Let us look at the situation.

For one, Sen. McCain is expected, as one commentator put it, to behave as a George W. Bush on steroids. Some go as far as depicting him as a candidate who aspires to become President McBush, because so many of his policies would duplicate Bush’s policies. For example, Sen. McCain is partisan of the imperial presidency theory, advanced and practiced in recent years by the Bush-Cheney administration. As recently as last May 6, he confirmed that if he were elected President, he would enthusiastically throw out the restraint on power established by the constitutional checks and balances and would embrace the Bush-Cheney’s claim of near absolute executive power. McCain is especially worried that the courts could stick to the letter and spirit of the U.S. Constitution and reject attempts by the President to establish a quasi dictatorship while dismissing Congress’ prerogatives. In McCain’s words, presidential executive power in the U.S. is too constrained by a judiciary that “show[s] little regard for the authority of the president.” On this very question, however, Sen. McCain seems to want it both ways. Is this sincere or is it solely a way to create confusion? For instance, on May 15, he tried to distance himself from the Bush-Cheney administration and professed that he now embraces the constitutional concept of checks and balances. Which McCain is the real McCain? Obviously, further clarifications are urgently needed.

Secondly, on foreign policy more than anywhere else, McCain can be expected to be a McBush plus. He can be expected to be a mixture of a simplistic George W. Bush and of a rabidly nationalistic and interventionist Dick Cheney, the last two always ready to immorally bomb people and ask questions later. McCain stands ready to continue the Bush-Cheney’s insane foreign policy. Therefore, no one should expect that he would be much different than what this duo has stood for over the last eight years, which is aggressive global

interventionism, disastrous unilateralism and excessive militarism. Under McCain, the United States would still be the global bully of the planet. This will lead to more geopolitical instability worldwide, more debt for the United States, and more economic disruptions in trade, especially for oil and commodities. There will be a high economic price to pay with a McCain presidency, make no mistake about it. The current slowdown or recession may be only a harbinger of things to come.

Indeed, listening to him, one has the feeling that Sen. McCain has never met a war he didn't like. For instance, if it were only up to him, American soldiers would still be in Vietnam, where he was a pilot, flying fighter-bombers that dropped bombs over North Vietnam. He has also said that he would like to intervene even more directly in South America. And in the Middle East, he has said that he would not mind having an American military occupation of that region for another one hundred years. In McCain's view, Iraq is an American colony forever, thus making sure there will be permanent war and permanent military occupation in that part of the world. In 1999, McCain even lobbied the Clinton administration to have the U.S. invade Yugoslavia with ground troops. America's Founders would be turning in their graves if they could see their cherished republic becoming a militaristic empire!

Thirdly, Sen. McCain does not seem to know or care about international law. Indeed, not only is Sen. McCain constantly confusing the Sunnis and the Shi'ites in Iraq, after all these years, but he seems to be completely lost as to the true meaning of "preemptive" war versus "preventive" war. A preemptive war or a preemptive strike is a self-defensive measure which is taken against a foreign country that poses an imminent and inevitable threat because it is about to invade, or is threatening to attack shortly. A preventive war is rather a war of choice or a war of aggression that is launched in anticipation of a loss of security or strategic advantage in a more or less far away future, or to gain foreign territories and resources. While a preemptive war is essentially defensive in nature, a preventive war is fundamentally imperialistic. In McCain's vocabulary, the two notions are confused since he says that he would not rule out launching preemptive wars, when in fact he means launching preventive wars of aggression "against future enemies" who pose no immediate threat to the United States.

A preemptive war can sometimes be legal and justifiable, and be in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. But a preventive war, because it is a planned and overt act of aggression, is never legal according to international law.

Fourthly, it seems that Mr. McCain is a man who has a chip on his shoulder, which is also reminiscent of George W. Bush, and that makes him a dangerous man to be trusted as leader of a heavily armed country like the United States. For example, remembering his days as a Navy pilot and a prisoner during the Vietnam War, nearly fifty years ago, he now says that he would like to go to Cuba to "punish" those Cuban soldiers who hurt his buddies in Vietnam. The Cuban government has answered him that there were no Cuban soldiers in Vietnam, but he keeps the grudge.

Another parallel with Mr. Bush is the fact that Mr. McCain, who will be 72 years old in August, attended a naval academy at Annapolis where he ranked near the end of this class, 894th out of 899 students. Thus, he cannot be expected to be a "philosopher president," and would be expected to lead with his guts rather than his head.

Fifth, Sen. McCain is a neocon candidate. The Israel Lobby, indeed, and the Neocons, that is to say the small clique of misguided ideologues who have whispered advice into George W.

Bush's ears for years, and who have begun whispering into McCain's ears, would be delighted to have a militarily hawkish and neoconservative McCain in the White House. For them, this would be a dream come true. Their pet project—a war against Iran—would become a reality.

Sen. McCain was born on a U.S. military base in a foreign country (Panama), and he is the son and grandson of military career individuals. That may explain why he is enamored with anything military. This is a man who believes there is a military solution to any political problem. He would be expected to follow the neocon-inspired so-called "Bush Doctrine." He would also be expected to embrace the Neocons' imperialistic and extreme Right Wing Project for the New American Century (PNAC) that calls for American global dominance. Armed with these two "doctrines", Sen. McCain, if elected President, would stand ready to launch future gratuitous and illegal wars of aggression around the world to ensure American supremacy. Those who liked George W. Bush will love John McCain. They will get all the fireworks and more. Whether this approach is good for the United States, for its economy and for its reputation, and for stability in the world, is another matter.

Sixth, a John McCain as president would be a gift from heaven to the American military industrial complex. It's easy to see why. —Sen. McCain is on record for advocating to increase the size of the U.S. armed forces from the current 750,000 to 900,000 members. Under his governance, the Pentagon and a host of defense contractors would see the U.S. defense budget, already bloated to a point of being larger than the defense spending of all 191 other countries taken together, would increase even further. Another red flag is the fact that McCain has surrounded himself with a host of far right lobbyists to run his campaign and raise money. This means that if ever he is elected, he will be a prisoner of these far right elements. Not a promising perspective.

Seventh, Senator John McCain has supported George W. Bush's huge tax cuts for the rich, which have resulted in large budget deficits and which have contributed so much to placing the United States in its current precarious economic situation, that is to say, being saddled with a falling currency and a spreading financial crisis. It is no wonder that George W. Bush has enthusiastically endorsed John McCain, although such an endorsement could prove to be a double-edged sword, since Bush's approval rating in the U.S. is the lowest of any American president, while a large majority of Americans believe their country is heading in the wrong direction.

Eighth, McCain's personal character is open to question. He is known, and this from his early childhood, to be prone to sudden and uncontrollable fits of temper tantrums. It is reported by biographer Robert Timberg ("John McCain: An American Odyssey") that right up into his twenties, he remained a strikingly violent man, "ready to fight at the drop of a hat". This rage seems to be at the core of his personality: describing his own childhood, McCain has admitted to having a quick temper and a short fuse (see his book "Worth the Fighting for: A Memoir") and he has confessed that as a youngster "at the smallest provocation I would go off into a mad frenzy, and then suddenly crash to the floor unconscious. When I got angry I held my breath until I blacked out!" Then, his parents would be forced to soak him in cold water, clothes and all, to wake him up.

A man with such a character is a dangerous man to be entrusted with the responsibility of custody of nuclear weapons. Even some of his Republican Senate colleagues say that he is too reckless to be commander-in-chief. And this is on top of his aggressive militarist stance in foreign policy and his obvious and avowed lack of knowledge in economic matters.

Ninth, there is the legitimate question of his age and personal health. The New York Times has recently been complaining about the lack of medical information regarding the presumptive Republican candidate and how little people know about his health. After all, this is not a trivial matter, since Sen. McCain will be 72 years old in August and he is recovering from an August 2000 surgery for a melanoma cancer, the deadliest of all cancers. A recently released medical report does not alleviate a bit concerns about this very issue.

And ten: Since the media have criticized Senator Barack Obama for his close association with an outspoken black minister, it is worth noting that Senator John McCain has also been endorsed by probably one of the worst right-wing religious bigots in the U.S. today, Texan anti-Catholic televangelist John Hagee.

Let us remember that televangelist (San Antonio megachurch) leader John Hagee, has said that the 2005 hurricane Katrina was God's punishment to New Orleans; he has also referred to the Roman Catholic Church as "the great whore" and called it a "false cult system" and "the apostate church." (There are 60 million Catholics in the U. S. and they could resent such insinuations.) And to top that, he has also declared that God sent [Adolf] Hitler to perpetrate the Holocaust in order to force Jews to move to Israel!

Therefore, it is certainly legitimate to ask why there is all the media attention on Senator Barack Obama's association with a controversial pastor, and hardly any directed at Senator McCain's association with another controversial pastor. Does this not smack of double standards?

In conclusion, when all the dots are connected, it would seem to be clear: Senator "100 Years" John McCain must be considered a man too dangerous and too unpredictable to be entrusted with the presidency of a heavily armed country. Do Americans really want a man whom some call "Senator Hothead", to become "President Hothead" and place him in a position of high responsibility? Let's hope that enough Americans will reflect about all that before the events unfold, not after. If Americans really believe that their country is headed in the wrong direction, does it really make sense to line up behind a candidate who wants to go even further in the same direction?

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