

Liz Cheney, Dick Cheney and the Rule of Law

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One could not accuse US Representative Liz Cheney of Wyoming of having a sense of irony. For some time, she has felt her party to be the hostage of a ghoulish monster who refuses to be slayed. And she fears her party has fallen out of love for the rule of law.

In being ousted from the third spot in the leadership of the Republican Conference in the House, Cheney has found a new morality. In her [floor speech](#), she called Donald Trump’s canard of a stolen election a “threat America has never seen before.” Opposing Trump’s interpretation of the result was a “duty”.

“I will not sit back and watch in silence, while others lead our party down a path that abandons the rule of law and joins in the former president’s crusade to undermine our democracy.”

After her speech, she told reporters that she would “do everything” she could “to ensure that the former president never gets anywhere near the Oval Office.

Cheney’s seemingly shabby treatment led such papers as the *Washington Post* to [remark](#) that truth was again under assault. “Truth is the issue upon which Cheney has made her stand - truth and her unwillingness to be silent for the supposed good of the team.”

Peter Wehner, who served in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and the two Bushes, [saw the event](#) as a “confirmation that the Republican party is diseased and dangerous, increasingly subversive and illiberal”. Eric Lutz, [writing](#) in *Vanity Fair*, called the Cheney display “defiant”, laying “bare the cowardice of her colleagues who, with their vote on Wednesday, affirmed what had long been clear: The GOP is the cult of Trump now, and fealty the price of admission.”

This is gruesomely fascinating on a few levels, given that Cheney comes from a family rather snotty about such concepts as the rule of law, verisimilitude and the Constitution. Her father Dick Cheney, the Vice Presidential dark operator in the administration of George W. Bush, was not exactly strong on such ideas, and proved rather subversive and illiberal in a number of ways. Old Dick, along with his lawyer David Addington and John Yoo of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, did much to read executive power in a manner

most imperial in nature.

For Dick Cheney, US executive power needed to be restored after the damaging effects of Watergate and the Vietnam War. The time that followed, he [lamented to reporters](#) on Air Force Two in 2005, proved to be “the nadir of the modern presidency in terms of authority and legitimacy”.

It is true to say that Trump also preferred a broad reading of executive power, one all too readily articulated by former Attorney General William Barr. But Cheney, Addington and Yoo were responsible for views that justified the bypassing and defanging of Congress, wiretapping of US citizens, torture of terrorist suspects, the establishment of military commissions, the breaching of international treaties and the waging of illegal wars. Such conduct has caused more than a [smattering of commentary](#) urging the prosecution of both Dick Cheney and President George W. Bush for a range of offences in both domestic and international law.

It would be churlish to claim that a father’s blackened record should somehow compromise that of his daughter’s. But the co-authored father and daughter work [Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America](#) repeats the old neoconservative interventionist sins that were so important in laying the ground for a Trump victory in 2016. Father Dick and Daughter Liz supply an apologia for such murderous disasters as Iraq while piling into President Barack Obama whom they stop short of accusing of treason. “The touchstone of his ideology – that America is to blame, and her power must be restrained – requires a wilful blindness about what America has done in the world.”

In 2009, Liz Cheney, along with fellow neoconservative Bill Kristol, co-founded Keep America Safe, an outfit steeped in a tattered worldview that proceeded to leave many Americans behind. As Conor Friedersdorf of *The Atlantic* [noted](#) in a battering piece on Liz Cheney in 2013, “Most Americans understand that investing trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives in Iraq was a historic blunder.” Not for Liz, who finds wars stirringly necessary.

Over the years, Rep. Cheney barely warranted a mention after securing the seat her father once occupied. As the third-ranking member of minority party leadership, she was a middleweight power with exaggerated expectations. Then came President Trump. The neoconservatives were outflanked. Fires were lit, casting light upon her cause. That cause, simple as ever, was an anti-Trump, using truth and democracy as crutches of polemical convenience.

To date, Rep. Cheney is pursuing a cause of martyrdom that is, like many such causes, futile. It was a martyrdom that was “well-planned”, as Republican political consultant Keith Naughton [noted](#) in *The Hill*. “There are no reports she actually worked the GOP caucus, canvassing and counting heads. Cheney didn’t fight back, she planned to lose.” In losing, she hopes to rebuild a neoconservative base that has withered into oblivion.

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