

Meet the New Bush, Same as the Old Bush

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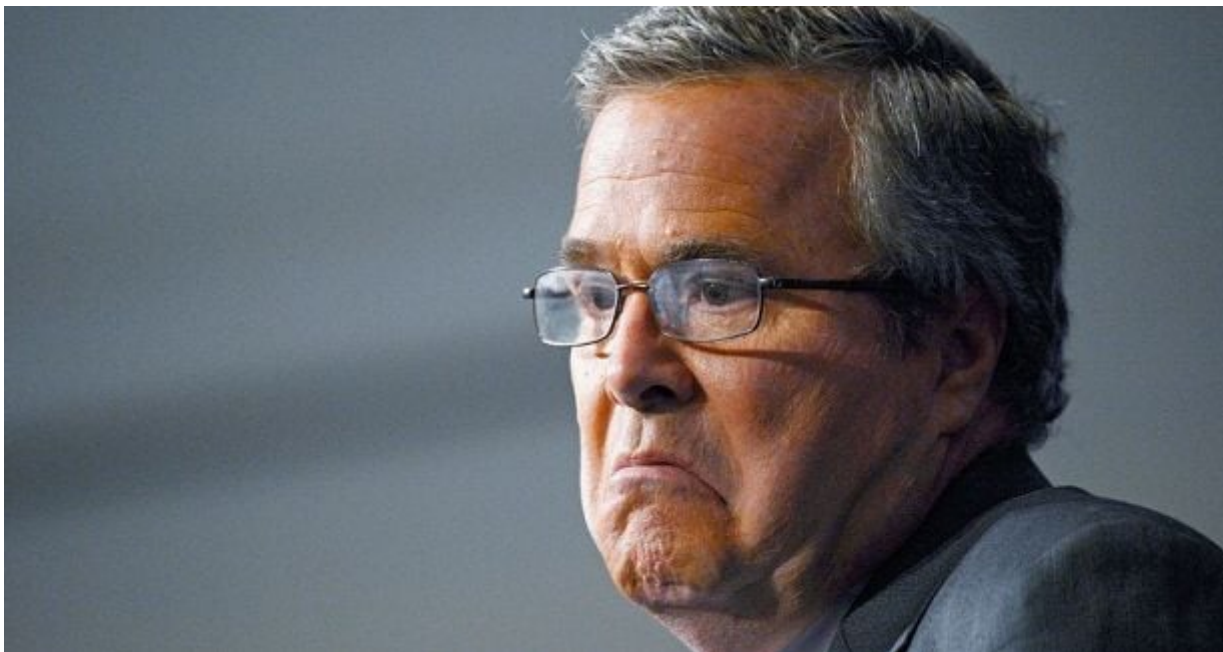
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Jeb Bush formally announced his candidacy for president of the United States. While he certainly has the name recognition, it is precisely his name, and the legacy that comes with it, that could be both one of his greatest assets and political obstacles.

Aside from being yet another Bush - a name that still evokes more groans and hisses than it does admiration - Jeb is attempting to present the appearance of a thoughtful and compassionate conservative as concerned about marginalized Americans as he is about fairness and justice. But beyond the rhetoric of empathy and equality, Bush has clearly and unequivocally demonstrated in both word and deed that he is, despite his public relations campaign to the contrary, simply more of the same.



Jeb's nascent campaign has already struck a number of key low notes, including his ambiguous and utterly ridiculous mishandling of the question of support for his brother's illegal war in Iraq. Jeb also recently made highly provocative statements about Russian President Vladimir Putin, calling him a "bully" as he set to distinguish his bellicosity from the perceived weakness of Obama when it comes to Russia. Moreover, Bush is raising money at a staggering rate from all the usual Beltway insider sources, including powerful Wall Street interests and lobbyists representing everyone from Saudi Arabia to Wal-Mart and Microsoft.

Indeed, far from being an independent man with his own ideas and politics, Jeb represents precisely the same tradition, and unquestionably the same potentially disastrous outcomes, that his name implies.

The more things change, the more they stay the same

One of the overriding themes of Jeb Bush's announcement speech in Miami was the notion that Jeb would be able to bring substantive change to Washington, and would be a leader willing to challenge the political status quo. In his speech, Bush proudly proclaimed that he would *"Take Washington — the static capital of this dynamic country — out of the business of causing problems... I know we can fix this... because I've done it."*

Perhaps the irony was lost on Bush and his crowd of supporters, but it certainly was not on millions around the country, and around the world, whose collective howls of laughter could almost be heard over the roar of the crowd when Jeb proclaimed that Washington is a *"club [of] pampered elites."* It seems that the Bush campaign believes that by referring to their candidate simply as *"Jeb"* they can somehow shake the foul stench of two previous Bush presidencies and their destructive policies. But of course, that is merely public relations, a cheap marketing ploy designed to conceal the fact that Jeb is the epitome of *"business as usual."*

While Jeb may wax poetic about cleaning up Washington, he is certainly no slouch as far as fundraising from wealthy elites goes. In fact, Bush seems to be openly flaunting his desire to be yet another corporate Yes-Man-in-Chief, one who will continue the domestic and foreign policies of his brother and father before him.

By March 2015, a full three months before he even announced his candidacy officially, Jeb Bush was already a superstar of the fundraising circuit, with projections reaching \$100 million for the first quarter of 2015 alone. A close examination of some of the key donors reveals that Jeb, like his brother George W. and father George H.W., is a willing recipient of massive contributions from Wall Street, major corporations and foreign interests.

As The Intercept reported, Bush's Super PAC, known as Right to Rise, has received significant contributions from a number of key donors including lobbyists for Saudi Arabia, as well as those for Wal-Mart, ExxonMobil and other major corporations. In addition, a major contributor has been Glenn Youngkin, managing director of the Carlyle Group, the firm which owns Booz Allen Hamilton, one of the world's top defense contractors.

The Carlyle Group, a secretive investment group comprised of many powerful political and financial elites, has a longstanding relationship with the Bush family. As The Economist noted in 2003: *"The Carlyle Group [is] a private equity firm that manages billions of dollars, including, at the time, some Bin Laden family wealth. It also employs Messrs [former President George H.W.] Bush and [former Bush administration Secretary of State James] Baker."*

So it seems that all the usual players are involved in bankrolling Jeb, including longtime Bush political machine apparatchiks from a variety of fields. Not to be forgotten are the Wall Street hedge fund titans, including Lewis Eisenberg and Henry Kravis, who hosted a posh fundraiser in New York where the Bush machine had previously held \$100,000 per plate fundraisers. The Bush camp has also received major financial backing from influential tech world figures in Silicon Valley and other important corporate donors.

Taken in total then, far from being the one to transform the *"club of pampered elites"* in Washington, Jeb Bush is, in fact, catering to those very same elites, the ones who finance

both sides of the presidential elections. For it should come as no surprise that Hillary Clinton is raising serious money from many of these same interests, with only slight differences of names and figures. So, anyone believing the rhetoric flowing like expensive wine at the Jeb celebrations must simply not be paying attention.

But corruption and corporate greed aside, a potential Bush presidency poses extreme dangers for the US, and indeed the world. Bush's foreign policy, predicated on aggressiveness and "*strength*," is likely to exacerbate already complex and tense situations around the world.

Bush's foreign policy: the Usual Suspects

Even a cursory analysis of the foreign policy team assembled by Jeb Bush gives a clear indication of the policies that will be pursued. Coupled with his at times absurd, at times shockingly belligerent, rhetoric, a future Jeb presidency could spell disaster for the US and the world. Those interested in peace, and with clear memories of the painful period of George W. Bush's presidency, are likely shuddering at the thought.

When one looks at the roster of powerful and influential figures on Bush's foreign policy team, so many of the names are eerily and painfully familiar: Wolfowitz, Negroponte, Chertoff, Hadley, Baker, Shultz, Zoellick, Hayden, Dobriansky, and many others. Running through the list of war crimes and foreign policy missteps for which this rogue's gallery is responsible would be like a laundry list of US imperialism in recent decades - both Iraq wars, support for death squads in Central America, the war in Afghanistan, the War on Terror, etc. If you consider the fact that Bush recently stated that "*I love my father and my brother...but I am my own man*," perhaps having a foreign policy team in which 19 of the 21 members are from the three former Bush administrations is not the best way to demonstrate that.

And of course that raises very serious questions about how Jeb Bush would act in regard to some of the major challenges in the world today. His recent comments during his European trip certainly do not bode well. His assertion that "*Putin is a bully*" demonstrates yet again that he and his neocon ilk still have not grasped the fundamental point that US aggression is not going to solve any of the issues in Eastern Europe: the conflict in Ukraine, the continued aggressive expansion of NATO, the escalation of military materiel and forces in the region, US missiles being pointed at Russia, and many other issues.

The Russian position has always been and remains today that it would like to address any issues through dialogue, but only in a climate in which the interested parties sit at the table as equals, not one in which Washington dictates to other countries as if they were subordinates. This sort of arrogance and hubris is precisely the rhetoric that tinges nearly every public pronouncement about foreign policy from Jeb Bush and his team.

Speaking to reporters in Europe, Jeb Bush recently explained that: "*There are things that we could do given the scale of our military to send a strong signal that we're on the side of Poland, the Baltics and the countries that truly feel threatened by the 'little green men,' this new cyber warfare and these other tactics that Russia now is using... I think we ought to consider putting troops there for sure.*"

Consider for a moment the absolute madness that Bush is describing: escalating with permanent troop presence in Eastern Europe, quite literally along Russia's border. While Bush and the entire US political establishment attempts to portray Russia and President

Putin as aggressors, their very own statements paint a different picture, one which raises the possibility of direct military confrontation with Russia, an outcome that could be disastrous for Europe and the world at large.

Bush has also hinted at escalation and yet another military occupation in Iraq, and possibly Syria. While attempting to distance himself from his brother's initial 2003 invasion of Iraq, he lauded the troop "surge" of 2007, and blamed the problems in the region, including the development of Islamic State (formerly ISIS/ISIL) on Obama's withdrawal of troops in late 2011. Bush outlined his position by saying: "*[Iraq's] security has been totally obliterated by the president's pulling out too early, and now these voids are filled by this barbaric asymmetric threat that endangers the entire region and the entire world... The best way to lessen the chance of having American boots on the ground is to have a foreign policy that is strong and secure and consistent.*"

Bush seems to be, quite paradoxically, suggesting that he would lessen the chance of having American boots on the ground by having American boots on the ground. It is not difficult to read into his statement that Bush is advocating for direct military intervention in Iraq and possibly Syria, ostensibly to combat Islamic State. The unpopularity of yet another Bush war in Iraq is what prevents him from making the statement directly, so instead he merely obliquely refers to it. But the danger and folly is no doubt apparent to all who have even a rudimentary understanding of the region and recent history.

One could point to many other ways in which a Jeb presidency would quite literally be merely a fourth and fifth Bush term. But the danger is not merely a repetition of those blunders and aggressive actions, for the implications would be truly global today. Russia and China have truly begun cementing a strategic partnership, Latin America is as unified today as it has ever been, and Eurasian integration is taking place at breakneck speed. Therefore, the sorts of belligerent policies for which neocons are known could have implications on a truly global scale.

Whether it is US actions vis-à-vis the Asia Pivot and the South China Sea, US backing for Ukraine and saber-rattling against Russia, US involvement in the Middle East, or a host of other issues, the stakes have never been higher. With Jeb Bush in the driver's seat the potential for a head-on collision is frightening, to say the least.

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