

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
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DEMOCRATIC HAWKS AND DOVES FIGHT FOR BILL'S HEART AND MIND

Mark L. Melcher

While public attention for the past few months has been focused on the fate of Bill Clinton's tax and budget legislation, there has been an amazing foreign policy war going on within the Democratic Party establishment. The outcome of this conflict could potentially dwarf the importance of the "economic plan."

Simply stated, it is a fight for Bill Clinton's heart and mind between state department doves, led by Secretary Warren Christopher, and neo-conservative hawks in lesser administration positions and within the party but outside the government. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this fight.

On the one side is Warren Christopher, the picture of caution, the Joan Baez of America's foreign policy establishment. On the other side, I think it is no exaggeration to state that the democratic neo-conservatives who oppose Christopher are more hawkish than any republican cold war warrior in history. These people generally support immediate U.S. military involvement in Bosnia as a springboard toward an American foreign policy that "fuses idealism and strength."

The key word here is "idealism." This group, for all practical purposes, advocates that the United States become the world's policeman, to use its military might not simply to protect U.S. interests, but for the express purpose of "exporting democracy." They applauded Bush's action in the Gulf, for example, but lamented that he had based his argument for it largely on practical rather than on "moral" grounds.

One leading Democratic neo-con, Ben Wattenberg once put it this way. "It's pretty clear," he said, "what the global community needs: probably a top cop, but surely a powerful global organizer. Somebody's got to do it. We're the only ones who can . . . the idea of spreading democratic and American values around the world is visionary. It's the right thing to do."

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Most democratic party neo-cons strongly supported Clinton for president. They liked his "moral outrage" over "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and his pledge to "do something" about it when he became president. In addition, they were impressed by his "moral" stand against "most favored nation" status for China, and his pledge to go easy on military spending cuts.

Needless to say, by choosing Christopher as his Secretary of State, by abandoning his opposition to MFN for China, by his unwillingness to press for military action in Bosnia, and by promoting much deeper military spending cuts than had been already advocated by Bush, Clinton has angered many neo-cons. And they are on the warpath.

Joshua Muravchik, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of a book appropriately titled, "Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny," states the neo-con case well in the August issue of *Commentary* magazine, in an article entitled "Lament Of A Clinton Supporter."

Muravchik says he supported Clinton because his "bold stand on Bosnia suggested a willingness to employ force that had been emphatically absent from prevailing democratic ideology since Vietnam." He says he was concerned about Clinton's antiwar activism during Vietnam, but was reassured in his hope that Clinton was a "new Democrat" by a number of factors, including his "advocacy of an assertive foreign policy, his coolness toward Jesse Jackson, his outreach to the party's Right--not to mention his selection in Al Gore of a moderate running mate and his positions favoring welfare reform, capital punishment, and more police on the beat."

Muravchik says that one of the principle factors in deflating his expectations for Clinton was the appointment of Christopher, who he says "had only limited experience in foreign policy." Christopher, Muravchik says, "had almost never voiced an opinion in public on any international issue. Therefore his views had largely to be inferred from the record of his patron, Vance, who had been the main architect of Carter's policy of seeking peace by palliating all adversaries."

Christopher's sole publication, Muravchik says, was a monograph issued by his law firm titled "Diplomacy: The Neglected Imperative," where Christopher declared "I believe we should grasp, as a central lesson of the [Iranian hostage] crisis, the wisdom in seeking negotiated settlements to international disputes." Muravchik asks rhetorically "why label Iran's unprovoked attack on American civilians as a 'dispute' to be 'negotiated,' rather than a crime to be punished, an aggression to be repulsed, or an injury to be avenged?"

Muravchik's article encompasses a vitriolic assault against Clinton on a variety of subjects unrelated to foreign affairs. Among other things, he attacks Clinton's "rampant imposition of ethnic and gender preferences" in his appointments and his favoritism for persons formerly affiliated with radical, left wing organizations.

He bemoans Hillary Rodham Clinton's leftist "ideological bent" and her propensity to say things that call "into question the administration's underlying intellectual seriousness and even its common sense." He charges that Ms. Clinton and her guru, Michael Lerner, have come across as people "who yearned to think deep thoughts but actually brought ridicule on the administration."

As such, the article will almost certainly be treated by the White House as nothing more than the mutterings of a spurned suitor. And there is clearly some truth to this. Muravchik admits that he had hoped to be named Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights, and that his nomination was killed because he is "anathema to the party's Left."

But the article nevertheless serves the serious purpose of illustrating the highly important ideological battle that is going on within the Clinton administration, as it attempts to formulate a comprehensive post-cold-war foreign policy for the United States.

So far at least, it would appear that Christopher remains Clinton's "main squeeze" in foreign policy. But as is well known, Clinton has a roving eye, especially for the flashy. And there is little question that the neo-cons offer more fun, bright lights and excitement than Warren Christopher can muster. Clinton has, on occasion, shown a strong affinity for the high minded, sanctimonious, utopian rhetoric of the democratic neo-cons. And he clearly yearns to "show his stuff" as commander-in-chief. And there's still three-and-a-half years to go.

Christopher has apparently decided that if the relationship is to going to last, he'll have to spice things up a bit, shorten his hemline, so to speak. Thus, the upcoming bombing of Bosnia.

Some neo-cons, including Marshall Freeman Harris who quit his job last week as state department desk officer on Bosnia as a protest against Clinton inaction there, claim that proposed air strikes will do nothing more than "assuage U.S. guilt over the coming death of independent Bosnia."

But there is little question that the administration's new aggressiveness in support in Bosnia is a distinct change from the lukewarm attitude that Christopher displayed last February when he went abroad ostensibly to convince European leaders to support air strikes. *Time* magazine quoted an unnamed British official as saying that Christopher left "the impression that he had no views one way or the other."

Christopher's Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Peter Tarnoff, explained in a background briefing for reporters after that visit that Christopher's attitude in Europe was "the opening of a new era of deliberately reduced American leadership." The fact that Christopher went to Europe with no blueprint for action, but simply to consult and share views, was not "different by accident" but "different by design," Tarnoff explained.

All of this is of course deadly serious. Will the U.S. in the post cold war era assume a strong leadership role with its allies? Or will it become just another voice at the party, offering suggestions and seeking "consensus? Will the U.S. use its significant military power only when its vital interests are directly threatened? Or will it use force to "make the world a better, safer place" and to protect people against man's inhumanity to man.

I don't know how these questions will be decided. More importantly, I don't think Clinton does yet either. Whether he will grow tired of Christopher's dovishness and become an advocate of a much more aggressive military policy remains to be seen. If he doesn't, it will be because he has a strong practical political side to him, the same side that prompted him to say earlier this year, "I

don't want to have to spend any more time on [Bosnia] than is absolutely necessary, because what I got elected to do was to let America look at our own problems."

It is interesting to note though, that the *Washington Post* reported last week that Clinton's "top national security advisors" have agreed to support a new initiative that would establish the United Nations as "ersatz world policeman."

The *Post* says the initiative, outlined in the classified final draft of Presidential Decision Directive 13, stops short of committing United States military forces to a permanent U.N. rapid deployment force for intervention in world trouble spots, an idea the paper notes Clinton supported during the campaign.

But the paper reports that the directive does commit the United States to support multinational peacemaking operations "politically, militarily and financially." And it endorses a broad new definition of what constitutes a "threat to international peace and security." This, the *Post* notes, sets the stage for forcible U.N. intervention when a country undergoes "sudden and unexpected interruption of established democracy or gross violation of human rights."

It should be noted that this initiative is pure democratic neo-conservatism. It says nothing about threats to U.S. interests. It speaks instead of threats to "democracy" and "human rights" anywhere on the globe. This is something quite new in U.S. foreign policy. While high sounding Wilsonian global idealism has been used by many presidents to justify U.S. military involvement in various wars and skirmishes, it has never been the primary reason for a military adventure.

The U.S. involvement in Somalia was arguably the first military action in U.S. history that was defended by its supporters entirely on humanitarian grounds. It could be argued that bombing Bosnia will be the second, since virtually all of Clinton's statements so far in favor of the action have been exclusively "moral."

As we saw last week, a president who forms his economic policy around some sort of home grown "morality" (ie. "the rich" aren't paying their "fair share") will pursue a very different economic policy than one whose aim is to simply provide every citizen with an equal opportunity and allow rewards to work accordingly.

And it is equally true that a president who pursues "moral" military causes is likely to become involved in vastly different types of adventures than one whose aim is to merely protect the nation's immediate interests. And as any student of military conflict will attest, "moral" conflicts, as compared to those fought for security or land, are often much bloodier and more difficult to conclude.

I wrote an article on this subject earlier this year entitled "Onward Secular Soldiers. In that piece I argued that while I had never been a fan of Christopher and his kind during the cold war, it might be better at this time in history to have a flock of doves running State, than to have an aerie of young, baby-boomer hawks who, like Bill, opposed Vietnam because they thought it was "immoral," but who might welcome a "moral" war today, so long as they didn't have to attend it in person.

I quoted at that time from a recent book by Paul Edward Gottfried entitled, *Carl Schmitt, Politics and Theory*." Schmidt, a German political theorist who died in 1985 predicted that as traditional religious-based behavioral and moral standards decayed in the United States, intellectuals of the left would substitute their own secular ones, and attempt to impose these "values" both on U.S. society and on other nations as well.

Schmitt argued that "values" are different from traditional Western moral beliefs. "Values," he said, arise from a culture of individual self-assertion and therefore must be asserted against competing ones. This, he noted, was not a mere academic exercise but a deadly confrontation, which could, if internationalized, easily lead to "just wars." These wars would be of unspeakable brutality, he said, "for any consideration of the enemy must vanish, must become a nonvalue, when the struggle against this enemy is concerned with the highest 'value'. . . for the highest value no price is too high to be paid."

I am not trying here to make a case against bombing Bosnia. That's an issue every American will have to consider personally. I am simply pointing out that any justification Clinton might offer for doing so should be analyzed carefully for signs that the United States is about to take on the difficult task of helping everyone in the world become "civilized, like us." That would not only be futile, but expensive.

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