

# Peace Out

By betraying his antiwar base, Obama has doomed the Democrats and created a new Right.

By Justin Raimondo

LAST YEAR AROUND THIS TIME the Pew Research Center organization undertook its annual overview of American opinion on foreign affairs. The idea is to measure the views of America's foreign policy elite—as embodied by the members of the Council on Foreign Relations—against the views of the American *hoi polloi*, i.e., you and I. The results sent shockwaves through the foreign-policy establishment.

Asked if the United States should “mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own,” 49 percent of Americans answered yes—“an all-time high,” according to the authors of the Pew report. But among the experts, policy wonks, and Washington insiders, answers in the affirmative to that question came to exactly ... zero.

This astonishing disparity demonstrates something we already knew: that the distance between the Washington mentality and the views of ordinary Americans can only be measured in light years. Washington's conventional wisdom is anything but conventional out in the real world—and the gap between these two worldviews is growing, not just in foreign policy but also here on the home front. Nothing demonstrates this ideological dissonance more dramatically than the rise of the Tea Party movement, the militantly anti-spending, anti-Washington tide that has swept incumbents out of office all across the country.

Democratic lawmakers who went back to their districts to sell Obamacare to their constituents found themselves confronted by crowds of angry citizens and shouted down. And was this ire was not targeted only at Democrats: long-time Republican officeholders who had never faced a serious primary challenge were suddenly confronted with real opposition. If they voted for TARP, they were fair game—and one by one the Tea Partiers took them out: Bennett, Murkowski, Castle. Republicans who went to bed on primary night believing in the divine right of incumbency woke up to the new reality: all bets were off.

This came as quite a surprise—an unpleasant one—to the pundits and political operatives who make up the world of Washington insiderdom. What in the name of the gods was going on here? they exclaimed. Given to trite answers, they came up with a few non-explanations: pulling their dog-eared copies of Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* off the shelves, they declared the Tea Partiers to be a symptom of “status resentment,” which according to Professor Hofstadter's ad hominem argument always gives rise to “extremism.” In short, the bad economy must have put voters in a foul mood, and since we all know people are motivated solely by how much money they are—or aren't—making, the soon-to-be-dawning recovery will cure them of their crankiness.

The problem with this analysis is that signs of dissatisfaction had been apparent for years, yet no one was paying attention. If we roll the Wayback Machine all the way to the beginning of the last presidential primary season, well before the crash of '08, evidence of a rising insurgency is abundant. It wasn't a right-wing insurgency, however, but rather one on the Left, the movement that allowed Barack Obama to upend the all-but-crowned heir apparent to the Democratic throne, Queen Hillary I, and propelled a one-term senator into the White House.

The anti-establishment force behind Obama was one that had lain dormant for a generation: the grassroots Left. It was reawakened by the same causes that had first given it life in the 1960s—opposition to war and demands for civil liberty. Torture, executive secrecy, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan filled the roles once played by segregation and the war in Vietnam. In 2008 as in 1968, the essence of the activist Left was its antiwar faith.

That faith proved difficult to maintain after the 1960s, as the conflict in Indochina wound down and left-wing activists turned their attention to identity politics. But the Left's social issues and statist economics have never been enough to sustain a popular movement. Nevertheless, after nominating peace candidate George McGovern in 1972, the Democratic Party deserted the anti-

war cause, terrified of being branded unpatriotic.

Deprived of its reason to exist, the grassroots Left dissolved. The radicals retreated to the faculty lounges they had once threatened to burn down, while their less ideological fellow travelers melted into the mainstream.

It was only in response to great shock—the 9/11 terrorist attacks and George W. Bush's subsequent crusade to democratize the Muslim world—that these ex-Trotskyites-turned-suburbanites woke from their narcotized sleep. The resurgent Left had an ongoing drama to validate its concerns: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the spectacle of untrammelled executive power running roughshod over the Constitution. When the war cries that had greeted Bush's call of "let's roll!" began to sour in the mouths of the American people, the grassroots Left took off, with Howard Dean—a right-of-center Democrat who supported gun rights and claimed to be a fiscal conservative—at its head.

As a contender for the 2004 Democratic nomination, Dean's big attraction was his critique of the decision to invade Iraq, and he went after his primary opponents early and forcefully. "I was able to sort out that the president was not being candid with the American people," he said at a candidates' debate in Iowa. "We have lost 500 soldiers and 2,200 wounded. Those soldiers were sent there by the vote of Senator Lieberman and Senator Kerry and Senator Edwards. That is a fact. And I think that's a very serious matter. And it is a matter upon which we differ."

Alas, Dean was angry before angry was "in," and he was blocked from the nomination by media-driven hysteria over the "Dean scream." After the thousandth repetition of the "scream" video in a 24-hour period, the Dean camp was cooked—but lived to fight another day.

The underground current of anti-interventionist "mind our own business" sentiment that had fueled Dean didn't go away: instead, it percolated at the grassroots, perfecting its anger at being excluded and awaiting a chance for expression. The "netroots"—the online community of lefty activists centered around the Daily Kos, Democratic Underground, and a plethora of other sites—were born.

The netroots were given their shot in 2006, when candidates they recruited and championed punished Republicans for their all-war-all-the-time foreign policy. The elections that year were a referendum on the neoconservative vision of an American empire, which voters rejected by returning control of Congress to the Democrats. The anti-interventionist trend, however, still hadn't peaked.

### **THE ANTIWAR LEFT MADE OBAMA PRESIDENT. IN RETURN, PRESIDENT OBAMA UNMADE THE ANTIWAR LEFT, EVEN AS POPULAR OUTRAGE OVER HIS DOMESTIC POLICIES REVIVED THE RIGHT.**

In 2007, all the world knew that Hillary Clinton was going to be the Democratic nominee, by right of dynastic succession. The pundits would have anointed Hillary that spring, all on their own, had it not been for the bothersome ritual of actually having to send the voters to the polls, a quaintly archaic custom that the elites haven't gotten around to abolishing yet.

Obama dogged Hillary over her vote in favor of the Iraq War and made an explicit appeal to the netroots and the antiwar movement. That gave him the momentum to snatch the crown from her brow. It didn't matter that he justified his opposition to the war on the grounds that we were prosecuting the "wrong" war and vowed to fight on the

Afghan front with greater vigor than his predecessor. At that point, the anti-interventionist base of the Democratic Party was ready to nominate anybody but Hillary.

The netroots convinced themselves Obama didn't really mean it: he was just talking tough to prove his national-security bona fides. Once elected, he would come out as a full-fledged antiwar bring-the-troops-homie. We all know how *that* turned out. Those Bush-haters who saw the Patriot Act and increased domestic surveillance as prefiguring a dictatorship can take no comfort in the Obama administration, which has defended and extended the legal precedents set by Bush.

The antiwar Left defeated itself by electing a Democrat little different from Bush. And now Barack Obama is dismantling his own party by repudiating

the causes that animated his base—the opposition to war and fear of the imperial presidency. In the run-up to the midterm elections, Obama tried instead to mobilize his party around the weakest items on its agenda: big government and cultural issues. No wonder Democrats and the progressive Left are demoralized: is the party's antiwar base really supposed to get excited about gays in the military?

The antiwar Left made Obama president. In return, President Obama unmade the antiwar Left, even as popular outrage over his domestic policies revived the Right. Progressives now face the same kind of embarrassment that conservatives experienced under Bush. As left-wing writer John V. Walsh notes,

Obama was not, and is not, simply the candidate of the Democrats. He was and is the candidate of the most “liberal” or “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party, the candidate of “Progressive” Democrats of America, of Norman Solomon, Medea Benjamin, Michael Moore, and on and on. If this wing of the Democratic Party betrays the hopes of its supporters, then surely there is nothing decent remaining in the party. And so it has become apparent in the last two years.

In 2006 and 2008, voters banished Republicans for getting us involved in endless wars and going on a spending spree. The same fate awaits the Democrats—and for the same reasons. But in the years to come the GOP may yet save the Obama administration by pursuing its own version of electoral suicide.

During the last decade, Republicans and their allies in the conservative movement abandoned fiscal conservatism to promote Bush’s “Freedom Agenda.” As a result, once the rally-’round-the-flag effect wore off in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Republicans had nothing to offer either their traditional base or independent voters. It took two years for a grassroots effort by conservative and libertarian activists, united in the Tea Party movement, to refocus the GOP on its core economic credo.

The upending of the Republican establishment by the Tea Partiers in the 2010 primaries has restored conservatives’ political viability—at least for the moment. But the GOP could easily blow its opportunity. Just as Obama demoralized his base and mobilized his enemies by pushing the wrong mix of foreign-policy hawkishness and domestic statism, Republicans like Mitt Romney are itching to pull another bait-and-switch on the Right by putting militarism ahead of domestic conservatism.

The foreign policy pursued by the Bush administration and upheld by virtually every Republican of national stature—Ron Paul excepted—is simply incompatible with the Tea Partiers’ commitment to cutting spending and reducing the scope of the federal government. Yet the GOP and leading conservatives remain in denial about the domestic economic consequences of an imperial foreign policy. Mark Meckler, a national Tea Party coordinator, expresses the grassroots’ view, “I have yet to hear anyone say, ‘We can’t touch defense spending,’ or any other issue ... Any tea partier who says something else lacks integrity.”

Much as the netroots and Obama’s activist cadres cut their teeth on the Dean campaign, it’s no accident that the Tea Party phenomenon began with Ron Paul’s 2008 run. His activists planned the first small Tea Parties later that year,

principles. Should Republicans proceed again as they did under Bush, the cycle will repeat—another war, another resurgence of the Left.

Both parties, in spite of their strenuous efforts, have failed to carry off a political realignment. If we vote Democrat, we get big spenders, a cultural agenda many Americans regard with distaste or indifference, and empty promises of peace dangled in front of our faces—and quickly jerked out of reach. If we vote Republican, we get big spenders engaged in endless wars and a cultural agenda many Americans find disturbing or irrelevant.

That neither party is consistently able to satisfy its base—let alone the broader American public—suggests that conditions are ripe for an upheaval in American politics. In some ways, the climate today resembles the one that brought forth the New Left in the 1960s. Support

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taking their inspiration not only from the original Boston Tea Party but also from the moneybomb Paul’s supporters held on its anniversary in 2007. The anti-statist Right, no less than the grassroots Left, draws strength from the public’s frustration with the bipartisan foreign-policy elite. The Tea Parties may be primarily concerned with Obama’s domestic programs, but key segments of activists are antiwar as well as anti-spending. They kept the flame of consistency alive through the dark days of the Bush administration.

The Democrats’ decline owes nothing to Republican leaders like John Boehner or Mitch McConnell; it is entirely the result of Obama betraying the antiwar Left at the same time as the grassroots Right finally returned to its economic

for the war in Afghanistan is at an all-time low: according to a recent CNN poll, a mere 37 percent support it, while 53 percent say it’s “another Vietnam.” At the same time, the scene also resembles the one that fostered the anti-tax revolts and New Right of the 1970s. All of this could give rise to a new majority coalition, perhaps one encompassing the best of the Tea Partiers, Ron Paul Republicans, Pat Buchanan brigades, and the long-quiescent Perot voters.

One thing is certain: thanks to Barack Obama, the change this country seeks will not come from the Left. ■

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# How Welfare States Die

For the fourth day running, France has been crippled by strikes. Airlines are canceling flights. Travelers making their way to Paris from de Gaulle and Orly face long delays.

Tourists are stranded. The Eiffel Tower was closed. Rail and subway traffic into the city has been curtailed. By shutting down refineries, French oil workers may cause a shutdown of gas stations and force the government to raid the strategic petroleum reserve.

Millions have gone on strike. One in ten high schools has been closed. Students at secondary schools and universities march beside workers and block entrances to paralyze the educational system. And what is the cause of this national tantrum?

President Nicolas Sarkozy has moved through the National Assembly and is pushing through the Senate a measure raising the retirement age for state pensions from 60 to 62. For if France does not raise that retirement age, its social security system will face a \$58 billion deficit by 2018. Sarkozy's reform follows his victory in repealing a decade-old Socialist law that mandated the 35-hour work week in France.

What world, one wonders, are these French living in?

Around 2050, those high school and college students will be near or above today's retirement age of 60. Who do they think is going to pony up for their pensions?

Today 23 percent of French men and women are 60 or older. That will rise to 33 percent by 2050, when there will be one French worker for each French retiree, if 60 is retained as the age of retirement.

Today 5.5 percent of French men and women are 80 or older. By 2050, that doubles to 11 percent. Who do the

French strikers think is going to pay the taxes for the medical expenses of this infirm and aged ninth of a nation?

Where the median age of the French is 40, in 2050 it will be 45. But that number disguises a far drearier reality.

Since 1970, the fertility rate of French women has been below the 2.1 children needed to sustain France's population, what demographers call zero population growth. For the next four decades until 2050, the fertility level of French women is projected to remain roughly 15 percent below ZPG.

Yet France's population of 62.6 million is projected to make a healthy leap to 67.7 million. How can a population continue to grow when the birth rate for almost 80 years running to 2050 is below replacement level?

Answer: As the French retire, age and die, France is filling up with immigrants coming to replace the departed and departing French and the millions of French children who were never born because their potential parents did not want them.

Where are the immigrants coming from?

Some come from Eastern Europe. But more are arriving from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and the former French colonies of the sub-Sahara. Arabs and Africans are populating cities like Marseilles and Grenoble, and filling up the burgeoning banlieues around Paris, where every few years they go on a tear and burn thousands of cars. For Paris police, the *banlieues* are off-limits, except when traveling in platoons.

These immigrants do not bring the occupational skills, education, or language abilities of French youth. Most will not earn the wages and salaries of native-born French and thus not contribute the same level of taxes to sustain a welfare state constructed by a Socialist Party that has ruled France on and off for decades.

With the end of the 35-hour work-week and retirement at 60, the peeling back of social welfare benefits granted to the French in the salad days of socialism has only just begun. They can march and protest and strike, but they cannot avert the inevitable.

What is true of France is true of Europe, where not one nation has a fertility rate that will replace its native-born. Among Russians, Ukrainians, Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians, the death rate already exceeds the birth rate.

With the financial crisis of 2008-09, followed by the threatened debt default of one or more of the European Union PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Spain), all of Europe also seems to be slashing defense budgets to save all they can of their welfare states. Which raises questions we debt-swamped Americans cannot put off forever. Why, 65 years after World War II, are we still defending these nations? When Europe has more wealth, more people, and a more lavish welfare state than we do, why should we impose sacrifices on our people to pay for the privilege of defending her people?

Instead of borrowing from Europe to defend Europe, why do we not charge them for providing that protection? If we are going to play Romans, why not demand tribute, as the Romans did? America is the first empire in history to pay tribute to its satraps. ■