

Candidate Obama: A Less Risky Alternative

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“Essential to this strategy is the UN Security Council, which should impose progressively tougher political and economic sanctions [on Iran]. Should the Security Council continue to delay in this responsibility, the United States must lead like-minded countries in imposing multilateral sanctions outside the UN framework.”

Sen. John McCain, June 2, 2008, before the annual AIPAC Conference, Washington D.C.

“The Iranian threat must be stopped by all possible means, and [it was a global duty to take] drastic measures’ to prevent it.”

Ehud Olmert, Israeli Prime Minister, June 4, 2008, before the annual AIPAC Conference, Washington D.C.

“I have proposed a responsible, phased redeployment of our troops from Iraq. We will get out as carefully as we were careless getting in.” ...[The] “danger from Iran is grave, [and I would] do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon – everything.”

Sen. Barack Obama, June 4, 2008, before the annual AIPAC Conference, Washington D.C.

“...I know that when I visit with AIPAC, I am among friends. Good friends. Friends who share my strong commitment to make sure that the bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable today, tomorrow, and forever.”

Sen. Barack Obama, June 4, 2008, before the annual AIPAC Conference, Washington D.C.

A few weeks ago, [I analyzed \[Global Research June 2008\] the relative worthiness of the candidacy of presumptive Republican Candidate McCain](#). In all fairness, a similar assessment of Senator Barack Obama’s candidacy would appear necessary.

Indeed, the Bush-Cheney administration will be history at 11:59 pm on January 20, 2009. On November 4, 2008, their successors, a new president and a new vice president, will have been chosen. Will it be an Obama team or a McCain team?

Sen. Barack Obama (D. IL) is the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate and the

U.S.'s first African-American presidential nominee from a major party. Considering the racial past of the United States, if he were to be elected President, this will have to be considered close to being a political revolution. The political climate for such an important shift in American politics is, as of now, most favorable to electing a Democrat as President.

For one, the current Republican administration, after eight years of blunder upon blunder, is the most unpopular of any administration in a long time, with a massive 65 percent disapproval rating, according to a recent Associated Press-Ipsos poll, while President George W. Bush is in the political cellar with a 28 percent approval rating. Even more revealing perhaps, very few Americans say their country is heading in the right direction.

Secondly, the American electorate is moving toward the Democrats with registration in both parties running 41 percent to 32 percent in favor of the Democrats. Thirdly, candidate Obama is much more intelligent, much younger, much more appealing and much more charismatic than candidate McCain. And, on issues, the Democrats should have a huge edge because people are tired of an expensive and unpopular war, because the economy is in bad shape and getting worse with the deepening financial crisis, and because a lot of people are suffering economically and financially, while oil prices are going through the roof. Many middle class Americans also have concluded that the time has come to improve the American health care system and the American pension system.

Therefore, since a Democratic presidential candidate should logically be the overwhelming favorite to defeat the Republican nominee in November, is this an election for Sen. Obama to lose? Will there be a "Bradley effect" with white voters telling pollsters they intend to vote for a black candidate, such as Senator Obama, but could instead vote their prejudice? Will there be a backlash from progressive Democrats as their candidate moves more and more to the right?

In theory, candidate Obama and his advisers would have to make a bundle of mistakes and come out with very bad decisions to lose this election, when everybody is expecting the Democrats to gain several seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives on November 4.

As of now, it is widely recognized that candidate Obama has begun his official presidential campaign on the wrong foot by disillusioning his own progressive political base by wavering on issues.

Indeed, on June 4, candidate Obama went before the 2008 annual AIPAC conference and mimicked nearly word for word his hawkish Republican opponent, candidate McCain.

In fact, you would not believe from the quotes placed above this article that the two main American presidential candidates are from two different parties, at least, as they position themselves toward AIPAC's political agenda regarding U.S. foreign policy. When it comes to AIPAC, both presidential candidates seem to have the same speechwriters and they behave as if they were members of a common plutocratic one party political system.

They both would not hesitate to bomb Iran and they both are pledging to make the world safe for Israel. One can also expect that neither would refrain from fomenting armed conflicts around the world. Even on some crucial domestic issues, such as government warrantless electronic surveillance, both candidates seem to be in agreement. Indeed, Sen. Obama has sided with the AIPAC-inspired so-called Bush Democrats in approving

warrantless surveillance of citizens by the government. On that issue, he has flip-flopped in approving immunity for George W. Bush and the telecom companies who wiretapped American citizens without a warrant before 9/11. Both candidates also rely on rich lobbyists for political advice. Last June 11, for example, candidate Obama had to remove longtime Washington lobbyist Jim Johnson from his vice president running-mate search team after it became known that Mr. Johnson had received preferential loan terms from the large mortgage lender Countrywide Financial, a firm that Sen. Obama had sharply criticized before.

On constitutional matters, Sen. Obama would not be that reluctant in emulating George W. Bush by using public funds to finance church-run activities. Indeed, he even wants to expand tax-financed faith based programs. The American military-industrial complex has also little to fear from an Obama presidency, since Sen. Obama intends to maintain the high level of U.S. military spending.

All this smacks of some improvisation, despondency and an absence of firm ideological commitments on Sen. Obama's part, and this plays into his opponent's charges. But more risky for him, this may persuade some voters that the two main presidential candidates are only marginally different and are controlled by the same plutocratic interests.

What the two presumptive U.S. presidential candidates also have in common is that both have been raised partly outside their own country, Obama in Indonesia and McCain in Panama. On this score, they are most unusual candidates and can be expected to be sensitive to international issues. In fact, both would be expected to be interventionist, McCain being only slightly more a military interventionist than Obama. This is because both adhere to the hubristic and imperialistic ideology that the United States government, without any democratic or legal mandate to that effect whatsoever, should rule the world. On the whole, however, it is to be expected that a President Obama would adopt a somewhat more "pragmatic" and a somewhat more "realist" foreign policy, in the Bill Clinton administration's style, while a President McCain would be inclined to duplicate more closely George W. Bush in following a more "rigidly ideological" and a more unilateral foreign policy.

It is probably on the question of the Iraq war that Sen. Obama and Sen. McCain would seem to differ the most. Foremost among Sen. Obama's objectives is his desire to extirpate his country from the presently occupied Iraq and stop spending more than one hundred billion dollars a year in that never-ending war and to devote that money to domestic social programs. On that score, a strong majority of Americans would side with him. Sen. Obama's official timetable is to remove all U.S. combat brigades from Iraq within sixteen months after becoming president. However, Sen. Obama now says that he can be flexible on this pledge and that he is keeping some room to manoeuvre based on future advice that he could receive from military commanders in the field!

This is still at variance with Sen. McCain's position on Iraq, which is closer to the current incumbent, George W. Bush. Indeed, McCain voted for the Iraq war in October 2002, and he would be very happy to continue Bush's policy in Iraq, even to the point of extending the military occupation of that country "one hundred years" into the future. On Iraq, therefore, the choice would seem to be clear: those who oppose the Iraq war should vote for Sen. Obama, and those who favor the Iraq war and other non U.N. approved wars would find in Sen. McCain a candidate more to their liking.

President George W. Bush sees that very clearly. Last May 15, (2008) President George W. Bush went to Israel and, speaking to the Israeli parliament (the Knesset), he did a most unusual thing: he attacked an American presidential candidate, Sen. Barack Obama, while in a foreign country. It was certainly most inappropriate for a sitting president to campaign against a fellow American in a foreign land.

On some narrowly defined social issues, Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain are further apart and it can be said that they offer a real choice. Indeed, on social issues, on the economy, and on budget priorities, Sen. Obama can be considered a progressive while Sen. McCain is a conservative. In fact, on the whole, Sen. McCain can be seen as the status quo candidate, while Sen. Obama is the candidate for change and reform.

Let us see the differences on key social and economic issues between Sen. Obama and Sen. McCain.

1. On Social Security, for instance, an issue closely followed by senior citizens and future retirees, Sen. McCain is on record as favoring a privatization of Social Security, while Sen. Obama strongly opposes such a privatization, as it could place retirees' incomes at the whim of the stock market. Here the choice is clear.

2. On Health care, Sen. Obama favors public health care and cheaper drugs; Sen. McCain opposes this approach. Sen. Obama would like to see a comprehensive health care system that would be compulsory for children but voluntary for adults. Sen. McCain wants to keep the current health system pretty much intact, while providing individuals with a \$2500 refundable tax credit for health expenditures. Here again the choice is pretty clear.

3. On the social issue of women's rights, Sen. Obama clearly sides on the side of women and their right to control their own body. Therefore, he considers that decisions about abortion must remain a matter between a woman and her doctor, and not be dictated by religious or political authorities. By contrast, Sen. McCain has moved closer to religious activists and now favors overriding the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, while keeping incest and rape as the only exceptions for abortion. It would seem that those who believe in women's rights should vote for Sen. Obama and those who believe that the state should impose its decisions on women should vote for Sen. McCain.

4. On the crucial related issue of who should sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, the choice between the two presidential candidates would also seem to be clear-cut. Sen. Obama could be expected to nominate progressive judges on the Supreme Court, while Sen. McCain would like to push the Supreme Court even further to the right than it is now. For instance, Sen. Obama opposed Judge Samuel Alito's confirmation (Jan. 2006) and Judge John Roberts' nomination for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (Sept. 2005). That could be the most long-term contentious difference between the two candidates.

5. On taxes and budget choices, the two candidates are way apart. For one, Sen. McCain was initially against the Bush administration tax cuts in 2003. Since then, he has embraced those cuts and the resulting deficits, while proposing a sizeable increase in defense spending. Sen. McCain would even go as far as requiring a two-thirds majority of Congress before raising taxes. Since expenditures would not be so constrained, this would insure permanent budgetary deficits for years to come. On the other side, Sen. Obama proposes that very wealthy individuals contribute more to financing Social Security. He would repeal Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy. He would also like to make the U.S. tax system more

progressive by requiring wealthy individuals to contribute proportionally more than those with lower incomes, while providing tax relief to the majority of American taxpayers. On that score, Sen. McCain is more a follower of George W. Bush, while Sen. Obama adopts the standard Democratic position of favoring the middle class and the poor at the expense of the very rich. The choice on this issue is fairly clear.

Overall, Sen. Obama seems to be surrounding himself with intelligent, competent and experienced advisers such as former Security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and former general William Odom. On the other hand, Sen. McCain seems to be emulating President George W. Bush by surrounding himself with lobbyists, and with neocon and far right advisers.

To conclude, Sen. Obama may be a better alternative than Sen. McCain, but his propensity to double-talk can be disconcerting. Let's say that he is possibly the least worst of the two main presidential candidates. It is my contention that former Vice President Al Gore, the candidate for whom a majority of Americans voted in 2000, would have been a better and more logical, and most likely, a more successful Democratic choice as a presidential candidate.

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