

BY GREGORY D. FOSTER

“Route-Stepping” Our Way to WWII



ROUTE-STEP, MARCH” IS a permissive military command that directs a marching formation to continue without a set cadence. So, “route-step” also is a common term of disparagement for sloppiness and indiscipline—an apt characterization, as it happens, for America’s current response to world affairs. We little people, absent more vigilance and skepticism, are in danger of being route-stepped into World War III by our rulers and their

ideological acolytes.

If “World War III” sounds hyperbolic and alarmist, that’s because it is. Precisely for that reason, it is the prevailing lingua franca of the Bush administration and those on the right who seek to solidify their hold on power by cowing the public.

President Bush himself, who has unwaveringly stuck to calling the hunt for terrorists the Global War on Terror, has recently taken up the claim that we now face World War III.

But the most outspoken proponent of this thesis is former U.S. House Speaker and putative presidential aspirant Newt Gingrich. In public appearances, interviews and newspaper commentaries, he has made the World War III mantra the centerpiece of a Churchillian patois designed to burnish his qualifications as a prospective commander in chief.

Speaking in apocalyptic terms of losing millions of Americans to weapons of mass murder, Gingrich would have us believe that all of the criminality, militarism and terrorism in the world—from North Korean missile firings, to Middle East violence, to Iraq and Afghanistan, to alleged terror plotters in Canada and England—is connected in some unified whole of civilizational conflagration. The only reasonable response is an all-out effort to achieve total victory.

Of course, proclaiming that we are at war, especially world war, strengthens the president’s hand as commander-in-chief and his claims to concentrated power; rationalizes continued gluttonous defense spending and restrictions on civil liberties and dissent; puts Congress, the media and an opposition party devoid of all credibility on national security matters on the permanent defensive; and instills fear in an electorate thereby more willing to forsake popular sovereignty for Big Brother protection.

Moreover, to invoke World War III is to evoke World War II, the last great, nationally unifying, Manichean, total war against regnant evil personified by Hitler. To be able to compare an enemy figurehead like Osama bin Laden to Hitler,

characterize one’s adversaries as fascist (Islamofascist), and accuse one’s critics of being historically illiterate appeasers (in the manner of Neville Chamberlain), is to create a cosmic symmetry of fearful acquiescence.

As Gingrich has been the White House’s de facto rhetorical proxy at home, Israel has been America’s continuing military proxy in the Middle East—a provocateur extraordinaire whose recent military campaign in Lebanon well served the Bush administration’s hopes for turning the rhetoric of world war into reality. There is a long-held, deeply internalized misconception among much of Washington’s policy elite that Israel is supremely competent at dealing with terrorism. Exploiting this misconception, Israel acted as it invariably does (and as its Washington soulmates invariably do): politically, tactically and militarily, devoid of strategic comprehension,

sensitivity or insight. The result was a debacle that multiplied the strategically debilitating effects of America’s Iraq debacle.

Political expediency, not strategic desiderata, clearly motivated both Israel’s actions inside Lebanon and the Bush

administration’s countenancing of those actions. Otherwise, both parties would have sought to:

- Strengthen Lebanon’s government, rather than irreparably weaken it by destroying large segments of the country’s infrastructure.
- Exploit the inherent disunity of international terrorism rather than give its disparate perpetrators grounds for common cause.
- Win the hearts and minds of people whose loyalties have now turned to Hezbollah and like-minded groups.
- Contribute to regional and global demilitarization through a measured, discriminating use of force that assiduously discriminated between combatants and non-combatants.

Clearly, two things characterize the Bush administration’s approach to international affairs. First, the high politics of statecraft have given way to the low politics of partisan jockeying. Second, the strategic exercise of power has been overwhelmed by the tactical use of force—to the extent that our foreign policy has been completely militarized. The inevitable result, absent a countervailing exercise of democratic prerogative by the American people, will be the Third World War those now in power have set us up for. ■

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LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Year of the Black Candidate



RUN, JESSE, RUN! In September, on Chicago's South Side, the script was flipped. This time it's Junior who's aiming for the top of the ticket. The younguns may be taking over. It's about time.

On Sept. 6, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) beckoned the media to his front lawn in Jackson Park Heights to announce that if he can raise \$4 to \$6 million and register 100,000 new voters, he will run for mayor of Chicago.

The six-term congressman and first-born son of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. hopes to take on the scion of another legendary political family, Richard M. Daley. It's almost certain Daley, Chicago's chief executive since 1989, will run for one more term in the February 2007 mayoral primary. A win would set him up to surpass the tenure of his father, Richard J. Daley, who died in 1976 after 21 years in office.

They called the senior Daley "the boss." Daley the younger has been dubbed "mayor for life." In recent months, however, his clout has faded in the face of a growing, multi-layered federal investigation into alleged corrupt hiring and contracting practices.

Jackson, 41, has hammered at Daley and a Democratic Party establishment that, he says, "is part of a prehistoric and bygone era that somehow slipped into the 21st Century." He suggests the Daley administration is neglecting the city's have-nots, and voters want change.

Two other African-American pols have already announced they will challenge Daley: Dorothy Brown, Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court, and community activist Bill "Dock" Walls. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), a Puerto Rican who represents part of Chicago's North Side, is also mulling a run. Still, it's the prospect of a Daley/Jackson match-up that has the political junkies salivating.

From Chicago to Los Angeles to Newark, efforts like Jackson's may be signaling a changing of the guard. The fiery preachers who rely on race-based protest tactics are being eased aside by political professionals bearing arsenals of polls, mailing lists and PACs. For example, Adrian Fenty, the 35-year-old Democratic nominee who is looking like the certain winner in Washington D.C.'s mayoral race, is known to carry two Blackberries.

Don Rose, a Chicago-based political consultant and longtime Jackson-watcher, cites two developments: Barack Obama's elevation to a U.S. Senate seat in 2004 and Co-

rey Booker's capture of Newark's City Hall. A victory for Jackson may "represent the prospect of a new generation of black urban leadership," says Rose, an advisor to Harold Washington, who was elected Chicago's first black mayor on a progressive platform.

The pundits have already pegged 2006 as the Year of the Black Candidate, as a plethora of African-American hopefuls run for top tier slots nationwide.

Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.) is looking to become the first black senator from the South since Reconstruction. Retired Pittsburgh Steeler Lynn Swann wants to unseat Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell. Ken Blackwell aims to be Ohio's next governor; ditto for Assistant U.S. Attorney Gen. Deval Patrick in Massachusetts. In Maryland, Lt. Gov. Michael Steele and former NAACP chief Kweisi

Mfume made respective bids in the Republican and Democratic senate primaries.

They represent a sign of political maturity and diversity in black leadership—three of them are Republican and only one, Mfume, is tied to the ossified civil rights establishment. That connection may have worked against him—he lost his Sept. 12 primary bid.

Jackson represents both the old and the new. He was elected in 1995 to represent Chicago's 2nd Congressional District, which spans the city's South Side and Southern suburbs. He has since crafted a solid progressive voting record, bolstered by a sophisticated political apparatus that employs internet-based fundraising and issue-based communications.

Jackson learned much at daddy's knee. His father, the founder of Rainbow PUSH, remains a civil rights icon who has advised and scolded presidents, run twice for president himself, and has traversed the world's troubled spots as an unofficial ambassador. However, the elder Jackson is also at the front of a withering line of '60s activists that don't connect with younger voters.

"Junior" must stretch way beyond the base of elderly and church-going blacks that know his father best. Mirroring the nation, Chicago's fastest-growing ethnic group is Latino. White progressives are another crucial constituency in building a cohesive progressive agenda.

In some circles, Jackson's controversial father may be a liability, and the son's ability to attract voters outside of the base is untested. He must burnish his progressive credentials and hone his vote-getting abilities to succeed. One thing's for sure: Get ready for some colorful and contentious political theatre. ■

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