

The 2008 X Factor

After a weekend in which 29 Americans died and the 82nd Airborne deployed in Baghdad, what the Iraq War will mean to the politics of 2008 becomes clear.

Hillary Clinton's early Saturday announcement of her exploratory committee was brilliantly executed and captured front page, cable, and network coverage all weekend. But it was a decision forced upon her.

Barack Obama, the "rock star," has been poaching on Hillary's donor lists and offering Democrats, in the style of New York mayoral candidate John V. Lindsay in 1965—"He is fresh and they are all tired"—a post-Bush-Clinton-Bush politics that says, "Goodbye to all that."

John Edwards has pitched his tent in the Cindy Sheehan camp. The Sunday preceding Dr. King's birthday, he rose in New York City's Riverside Church, where King had denounced the Vietnam War, to decry Bush's surge of 21,500 troops as "the McCain Doctrine," called for immediate withdrawal of 40,000-50,000 U.S. troops, and threw down the gauntlet to Hillary, declaring, "Silence is betrayal."

By midweek, Hillary was out with her own plan for redeployment.

The Democratic nominee will likely be one of these three. In every national or Iowa-New Hampshire poll, they are first, second, or third. But there is a wild card.

On Feb. 25, America will watch the Academy Awards where the Oscar for best documentary will likely go to "An Inconvenient Truth." If Gore wins the Oscar, addresses the nation for two minutes on global warming and the war, then appears on Oprah, Leno, Letterman, Stewart, and Colbert, a subsequent declaration of candidacy would put him in the top tier. And unlike Edwards and Hillary, Gore opposed the war.

In the Democratic Party, the Iraq War is a lost cause that ought never to have been begun, and any candidate who has not come to that position by February 2007 will not be the nominee.

In the Republican Party, the war is less likely to bring about the unity Democrats will have achieved by year's end. For by summer's end the surge will be over. While there may have been a temporary reduction in massacres by then, no one believes an additional 21,500 troops in a Texas-sized nation of 26 million can turn around a war General Powell says we "are losing" and Bush concedes "we are not winning."

Already nearly a fifth of the Republicans in the Senate, including Chuck Hagel and presidential candidate Sam Brownback, have come out against the surge. The frontrunners, Guiliani, McCain, and Romney, however, still back the president.

But while McCain is far out in front in raising money and lining up support, he is also the single national figure, beyond Bush and Cheney, most identified with the least popular war in U.S. history. If McCain wishes to be president, it would be best for him for this war to be in its final act, one way or the other, by 2008.

If the war has been lost by then, as many believe it is already, McCain can say: Rumsfeld lost it because he fought it the wrong way, and we shall never do that again. But if the war is still going on, it will be the issue of 2008, and it is hard to see America voting to continue or embrace the "McCain Doctrine" and escalate by sending in 100,000 more troops.

The GOP is thus looking at a situation in 2008, where the party will be as divided as Democrats were with McCarthy, Humphrey, Bobby Kennedy, and LBJ in 1968, while Democrats will be as united as the GOP was under Nixon. Had George Wallace, who got 13 percent, been out of the race, Nixon would have won a landslide.

Anything that might alter the course of events and affect the war picture by 2008? Indeed: a preemptive strike on Iran.

Should it occur, writes Wayne White, an intelligence officer at State until 2005, "Such action would likely involve not only taking out widely dispersed nuclear-related targets and nearby anti-aircraft defenses, but also portions of the Iranian air force assigned to defend these targets. And that's just for starters.

"In order to reduce Iran's ability to retaliate in the Persian Gulf such a plan would probably also include taking out Iran's array of anti-ship missiles along the northern coast of the Gulf, its Kilo-class submarines, other naval assets and even some targets related to Iran's long-range missile capabilities."

Is such an attack being considered? Nick Burns, No. 3 at State, was at the Herzliya Conference this weekend. "Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon; there's no doubt about it," Burns told the Israelis, "the policy of the United States is that we cannot allow Iran to become a nuclear weapons state."

Burns was cheered and echoed by ex-Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz: "The year of 2007 is the year of decisiveness. . . the free world doesn't have the privilege to drag its feet on Iran and hope for best."

Democrats failed to stop this war. Can they stop the next one? Or do they suspect, and silently support, what they think is coming? ■

The Next Conservatism

By rejecting ideology and embracing “retroculture,” the Right can recover itself and perhaps reverse America’s decline.

By Paul M. Weyrich and William S. Lind

The only surprise about the Republican debacle in the 2006 congressional elections was that many conservatives found it surprising. For at least a decade, the conservative movement has been on intellectual cruise control. The well of conservative ideas that so richly watered conservative political successes from the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 through the Contract with America and the Republican capture of the House of Representatives in 1994 ran dry before the Clinton years ran out. Most conservatives know that liberalism suffered political eclipse as a consequence of intellectual aridity, of an agenda that had become a museum piece of New Deal-era class warfare.

Why were they surprised when a similar conservative idea deficit led to a similar electoral defeat? Just as you can’t beat something with nothing, the 2006 vote showed that conservatives can’t beat nothing with nothing.

Conservatism has become so weak in ideas that during the presidency of George W. Bush, the word “conservative” could be and was applied with scant objection to policies that were starkly anti-conservative. Americans witnessed “conservative” Wilsonianism, if not Jacobinism, in foreign policy and an unnecessary foreign war; record “conservative” trade and federal budget deficits; major “conservative” expansions of the power of the federal government at the expense of traditional liberties; and nonchalant “conservative” de-industrialization and dispossession of the middle class in the name of Ricardian free trade and Benthamite utilitarianism. No wonder the American people are confused and disillusioned by conservatism if these are its actions when in power. Were Russell Kirk still with us, what would he now call himself?

If conservatism is to be re-established as an intellectual force, and not merely a label for whatever the establishment does to its own benefit, it must first re-awaken intellectually. We need a new conservative agenda.

Since well before the 2006 elections, the authors of this essay have sought to begin the discussion of the next conservatism. Our motive was not solely political success. We recognized some time ago that the old conservative agenda,

comprised largely of anti-communism and free-market economics, had run its course. It was born in the Cold War and much though not all of it became obsolescent once that war was won. The next conservatism, in our view, has to come to grips with a new and different external reality, one in which “the permanent things” remain permanent but must be related to new phenomena. Our starting point was Kirk’s observation that conservatism is not an ideology. Rather, it is a way of life.

Ideology, a child of the French Revolution, says that according to thus-and-such set of abstract principles, reality must be thus-and-so. Inevitably, reality is too complex to fit the ideological Procrustean bed. When that happens, the ideology in question decrees that certain aspects of reality, those that conflict with its precepts, must be ignored. If the ideology, through politics, achieves control of a state, it uses the power of the state to enforce its decree. Anyone who dares doubt that all of history is a factor of the ownership of the means of production or of the superiority of Aryan blood or of the inherent evil of white men and Western civilization is penalized by the state. If the ideology gains sufficient power, the penalty becomes the concentration camp, the Gulag, or the bullet into the back of the neck in the basement of the Lubyanka.

Real conservatism rejects all ideologies, recognizing them as armed cant. In their place, it offers a way of life built upon customs, traditions, and habits—themselves the products of the experiences of many generations. Because people are capable of learning over time, when they may do so in a specific, continuous cultural setting, the conservative way of life comes to reflect the prudential virtues: modesty, the dignity of labor, conservation and saving, the importance of family and community, personal duties and obligations, and caution in innovation. While these virtues tend to manifest themselves in most traditional societies, with variations conservatives usually value, they have had their happiest outcome in the traditional culture of the Christian West.

From this it follows that the next conservatism’s foremost task is defending and restoring Western, Judeo-Christian culture. Not only does this mean the next conservatism is cultural conservatism, it also tells us we must look beyond politics.