

tionism is alien among our political and journalistic elites. In the wake of the ghastly attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, this country may soon be involved in its most extensive war since Vietnam. Neoconservative chickenhawks such as William Kristol and Robert Kagan have been beating the drums for war with several countries in the Middle East. Kristol and other talk-show commandos do a lot of talking about war. But, as Smedley Darlington Butler would point out, they won't do the dying.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MLK and Terrorism

by Paul Gottfried

On February 12, an endorsement of the United States' war against terrorism, organized by the "nonpartisan" Institute for American Values, went out to President Bush and the national media over the signatures of what the U.S. State Department described as "sixty prominent U.S. academics." The term "prominent academic" can now be applied to Bill Kristol, Hillel Fradkin, and Midge Decter.

If only the signatories had not strained so hard to look smart, they might have confined their support to a patriotic cheer or simply invoked the time-honored argument that regimes are supposed to protect their citizens or subjects against violence. The signatories (really, the authors) cannot figure out whether

they are pushing a particular religion or set of doctrines. They say they are not, but even those who claim to belong to "secular traditions" are convinced "that invoking God's authority to kill or maim human beings is immoral and contrary to faith in God." It is strange to receive theistic instruction from self-avowed secularists who obviously have not read the Pentateuch—particularly the commands given to the children of Israel to exterminate Amalekites and other morally reprobate tribes. Such acts are not only allowed but, even more shockingly, are laid as commandments upon the Israelites, whether fighting idolatry or settling their land. Does this mean that the Old Testament (or possibly only Deuteronomy and Judges, where such teachings abound) runs counter to "faith in God," because it contradicts what "sixty prominent academics" say on terrorism? Or are all religions that contradict this new Sanhedrin of Sixty hereby rescinded?

While the signatories say that they are not speaking as members of any recognizable confession, they hint broadly at a worldview that they would like to have the entire human race adopt. The war they endorse (and, it is reasonable to infer, hope to expand), is based on a "universal religious" principle, which they happily ascribe to Islam as well. They reject the charge that

these values are not universal at all, but instead derive particularly from Western, largely Christian civilization. We disagree. We recognize our own civilization's achievements but we believe that all people are created equal.

Their "universal" credo goes on to reaffirm the moral validity of the United Na-

tions' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the soundness of the teaching of "Dr." Martin Luther King, Jr., that "the arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice, not just for the few or lucky, but for all people." Supposedly, King's reformulation of classical and medieval natural-law thinking becomes universally palatable once it is associated with a black socialist practicing civil disobedience. But King was specifically addressing American laws, which enforced racial separation in education and in public accommodations in some states and municipalities. (Before his death, he would also invoke his variation on natural-law theory to justify political interventions against, for example, municipalities that failed to pay garbage workers what he considered to be a just wage.) Whether King was right or wrong to oppose these laws and to encourage massive civil disobedience is a question for historical debate, but whether his partisan speeches are the demonstration of universal moral laws, on behalf of which we are bombing Afghanistan (and may soon be bombing Iraq), is an entirely different matter.

What the signatories may mean is that everyone should believe that the U.S. government has a moral duty to punish those it rightly suspects of practicing terrorism against us. An honest person would have no problem with punishing guilty terrorists but, unlike the signatories, would not pretend that all religions enshrine a "universal" dogma that happens to be his own. Moreover, it is meaningless to assert that "we are by far the Western world's most religious society." What exactly does that signify in a country in which most of the Christian population knows next to nothing about the Bible or (as my colleagues say) about biblical storylines and, according to Gallup polls, believes that the New Testament endorses homosexual marriage? In a country where even Santa Claus, not to mention Christmas, has been driven out of public schools, is it true to assert that "spiritually, our separation of church and state permits religion to be religion, by detaching it from the coercive power of the state"? While not all of the signatories would disagree with this criticism (in fact, some have written voluminously on the same problems), each one, by signing the "letter," vouches for a counterfactual picture of church-state relations in the United States. Furthermore, contrary to the letter, there is no evidence that the present American regime constitutes a

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religiously defensible golden mean between theocracy and secularism.

On page after page, the signatories tip their hand by calling attention to the Neoconservative Book of Common Prayer, featuring Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Such allusions remind me of Mr. Dick in David Copperfield. A true obsessive, the perpetual houseguest of David's aunt could not end a conversation without babbling on about the execution of Charles I. In a similar but far less charming way, neocons cannot talk about anything (indeed, one wonders whether they can simply order a hot dog at a ballgame), without bringing up Lincoln, the American refounder, and M.L.K., the purifier of a once-racist nation. While Thomas Fleming insists that the King references are only a stumbling attempt to come up with a natural-law argument for a war that the signatories propose to defend, my own thoughts are darker. These references may be the homage paid to those whom the neocons can never put out of their heads, the same way Dickens' character obsessed about King Charles the Martyr.

Some who signed "What We're Fighting For: A Letter from America" may have had to swallow hard before affixing their shaky signatures. For those who would like to continue to believe in their general, if now compromised, intellectual honesty, it is possible to hope that this was the case, at least for a few.

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POLITICS

Conservative Balance-of-Power

by Greg Kaza

A remarkable yet unreported trend in U.S. politics over the past decade is the balance-of-power held by conservative political parties in federal elections, if we define balance-of-power as a vote total equal to or greater than the difference in

votes between the Democratic and Republican candidates in a race. Some media pundits noted that Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader held the balance-of-power in 2000, both in the overall popular vote and in eight states. Yet Reform Party candidate Patrick J. Buchanan also held it in five states (Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin) and came within two tenths of one percent of achieving it in the popular vote.

Since the Newt Gingrich-engineered Republican takeover of the U.S. House in 1994, conservatives have held balance-of-power in at least one race in which a Democrat was victorious in each election cycle. They stood for office as candidates of such third parties as the American Independent, Constitution, Patriot, Right-to-Life, and New York Conservative parties. The races in which they held balance-of-power, allowing Democrats to win, were in California (District 36), Oregon (1), and Pennsylvania (15) in 1994; Massachusetts (6) in 1996; Washington (8) in 1998; and Minnesota (6) in 2000. The Democrats who benefited, arguably, from GOP indifference to paleo-conservative issues were Jane Harman of California; Elizabeth Furse of Oregon; Paul McHale of Pennsylvania; John Tierney of Massachusetts; Jay Inslee of Washington; and Bill Luther of Minnesota. Only Representatives Furse and McHale no longer serve in Congress.

Conservative balance-of-power has more significance today in a closely divided House (221 Republicans, 212 Democrats, and two independents) than after the 1994 election, when Republicans outnumbered Democrats, 230 to 204 (with one independent). In addition to the six elections in which Democrats were victorious, Republicans won four other House races in which conservatives held balance-of-power. A mere shift of five seats would return the House to Democratic control.

The late Murray N. Rothbard termed balance-of-power "the spoiler tradition in American politics." The trend can be traced to the mid-1960's when the New York Conservative Party began fielding candidates to oppose moderate Republicans. Conservative Party cofounder Kieran O'Doherty failed against Republican Congressman John V. Lindsay, a Barry Goldwater critic, in New York's 17th District in 1964. But *National Review* founder William F. Buckley held balance-of-power as the conservative candi-

date in New York's 1965 mayoral race against the victorious Lindsay. The Conservative Party has held balance-of-power more than any other right-wing party, though the Libertarian Party, founded in 1971, has achieved it far more frequently (49 times), including in six U.S. Senate and 14 House races won by Democrats. The Conservative Party's greatest triumph was the election of Buckley's brother James to the U.S. Senate in 1970. New York Republican insiders still termed the Conservatives "spoilers." Indeed, Democrats won close House races featuring Conservatives in 1966 (District 27) and 1974 (2). Since the late 1970's, the Conservative Party has relied more on New York's unique cross-endorsement law that allows it, like the Right To Life Party, to endorse federal Republicans. Still, in New York's 19th District in 1996, Conservative Joseph J. Dio Guardi held balance-of-power against Republican Sue Kelly and Democrat Richard S. Klein.

Conservative candidates have held balance-of-power far more frequently since the mid-1960's than left-of-center parties like California's Peace & Freedom Party or the Naderite Greens. Yet the Socialist Party, circa 1900-1920, held it more often than any other 20th-century third other party. Statistician Charles Ferris Gettemy, following the 1904 election, shared his findings with President Theodore Roosevelt, a New York Republican. Mr. Roosevelt, in a February 1, 1905 reply that might be misinterpreted today, termed the Socialist vote a significant development. Mr. Roosevelt played the role of spoiler in 1912 when his third-party Bull Moose candidacy cost Republican President William Howard Taft the election.

During the 20th century, Socialist candidates held balance-of-power in 221 elections, including 120 races lost by Democrats. Democratic presidents Woodrow Wilson (1913-19) and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-45) co-opted key planks from the Socialist platform (child-labor laws, income and inheritance taxes, unemployment insurance, Social Security) after the Socialist balance-of-power grew. Wilson's papers reveal that he met a Socialist delegation in January 1916. Likewise, FDR met perennial Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas many times at the White House. In 1928, FDR had been narrowly elected New York governor (49 percent), defeating Republican Albert Ottinger (48.4 percent). Socialist Louis