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## The Establishment's Last Stand

By Justin Raimondo  
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The good news for anti-interventionists out of Iowa is that Bernie Sanders has defied the conventional wisdom and effectively delayed the coronation of Hillary Rodham Clinton. In spite of a ramped up effort to isolate the Vermont socialist from the Democratic mainstream, Hillary is in for a bruising fight that will only get bloodier when Sanders smashes her in New Hampshire, as seems likely.

On the Republican side of the aisle, the news from Iowa is decidedly mixed. There are glad tidings in the fact that the two candidates not wholly-owned subsidiaries of the neocons came in first (Cruz) and second (Trump). Yet the unexpectedly strong third place finish by ~~the War~~ ~~Twink~~ Marco Rubio has the War Party celebrating. Not that we didn't know Rubio was going to come in third all along: that's what the polls told us, and they were right. Yet we were being primed in the run up to the actual balloting with the narrative that third place was actually a "victory" for the Cuban Bombshell. And we have the "mainstream" media chiming in with the usual neocon suspects when it comes to pushing this line.

Ideologically, Rubio is the perfect neocon vehicle. He is not only opposed to the Iran deal, he has also suggested war with Tehran is practically inevitable. He avers that we should've been arming the Syrian Islamist rebels from the very beginning, a view he shares with Hillary Clinton. He has run ads complaining that the US spies on Israel – but hasn't said a word about extensive Israeli spying on the US. He wants to add \$1 *trillion* to the military budget: he wants to shoot down

Russian aircraft over Syria and confront Moscow in Ukraine. And his dog whistle to the neocons is his campaign theme: he touts “a new American century,” limning the battle-flag of the old Project for a New American Century that did so much to give us the invasion of Iraq.

The Rubio campaign, in essence, is the GOP Establishment’s last stand against the roiling tides of populist backlash that threaten to bring it down. Which is why the donor class is rapidly moving into Rubio’s camp. The Cruz campaign is an attempt to straddle the fence: while the Canadian-born Senator has been critical of the neocons, he’s such a consummate opportunist that he isn’t above placating them as long as he gains some political benefit. And his foreign policy stance contains elements of neoconservatism, as well as a somewhat attenuated realism. Trump, as this perceptive piece on his foreign policy team makes clear, is an unambiguous realist, which is why the neocons have pulled out all the stops in their effort to derail the Trump Train.

Lost in the shuffle, unfortunately, is the long shot campaign of Sen. Rand Paul, who hoped to utilize the libertarian network in the GOP built up by his father. Having squandered that legacy by pandering to the neocons, coming up with a Cruz-esque “conservative realism” to stand in for libertarian anti-interventionism, and being a little too clever for his own good, Sen. Paul cut the ground out from under his own feet. Which just goes to show that “pragmatism” isn’t all that pragmatic. The Rand Paul campaign wound up being co-opted by Cruz, who made an open – and seemingly successful – bid for the Paulian base. The sort of snobbery and cultural leftism rife among libertarians who disdain populism as a matter of “principle” ensured that those former Ron Paul voters not scarfed up by Cruz would defect to Trump.

It’s theoretically possible that Paul, having learned his lesson and gone back to his “radical” roots, could rebound in New Hampshire – but I wouldn’t bet the farm on it.

The lesson to be learned here is identical to the one members of the Libertarian Party were taught in 1980, when LP candidate Ed Clark, backed by Koch money, announced that libertarianism is the equivalent of “low-tax liberalism.” As Murray Rothbard put it at the time: “And they didn’t even get the votes!”

On the Democratic side of the equation, the populist insurrection against the Establishment scored a stunning victory in Iowa. In spite of a number of dicey Clintonesque incidents – thanks to some very questionable shenanigans, the real results may never be known – the Sanders team managed to fight the Clintonians to a draw. That is a huge blow to Queen Hillary’s coronation plans. She is looking at a looming defeat of major proportions in New Hampshire – that is if the poll numbers hold – and what two major beatings prefigure on Super Tuesday is anybody’s guess.

So far the Sanders campaign has gone easy on Hillary, with the candidate declaring his indifference to the email scandal – in spite of the fact that whistleblowers have suffered grievously for what she appears to be getting away with – and stupidly insisting on running a “positive” campaign. Some observers, this one included, have seen this as evidence that the Sanders campaign, instead of being a genuine rebellion, is in fact a means for the Clintonians to herd reluctant leftists into the Democratic column in the general election. After all, if Bernie fails to get the nomination, is there any doubt that he’ll endorse Hillary?

Yet this matters less than either Sanders or Team Clinton imagine. Unlike the Trumpist revolt on the Right, the Sanders “political revolution” has little to do with the personality of its leader. It seems genuinely to be about ideology. A stunning 48% of Iowa voters described themselves as “democratic socialists” in one poll: there lies the future of the Democratic party. The vast majority of those voters are, like Sanders, opposed to the endless wars and an expensive empire that drains the country of funds they want to maintain the welfare state.

The future of the GOP is far less clear. This is a party that has had the neocons’ claws embedded in it for quite some time, and they aren’t about to voluntarily relax their iron grip any time soon. They have the backing of the donor class, and the mainstream media, both of which are viscerally hostile to any variety of populism arising from the right side of the spectrum.

The neocons have their candidate in Rubio, but they could live with Cruz, however uneasily. The Donald, however, is a different matter entirely. Trump’s unabashedly realist foreign policy is diametrically opposed to the neocons’ effusive globalism. If he should beat the odds and get the GOP nomination, the neocons’ will flee the party, with some of them glomming on to Hillary and the rest glumly sitting out the election while throwing spitballs from the sidelines.

The GOP is really two parties, and has been for quite some time. The country club Republicans pay lip service to “free market” economics but are in thrall to crony capitalism just as much as the Democrats (except they owe their fealty to different capitalists.) They oppose eminent domain seizures of private property – but not where the Keystone pipeline is concerned, because they stand to make a bundle off it. They think Charles Krauthammer is an intellectual worth listening to and opine that if only we’d stayed in Iraq everything would be hunky dory over there.

On the other hand, grassroots Republican voters are a different lot entirely. Like most Americans, they see the Iraq war as a disaster and could care less about what happens in the next town over, let alone thousands of miles away. They wonder why the federal government is letting millions of illegal immigrants break the law and get away with it when their own encounters with law enforcement are likely to end less benignly. And their own faith in free market economics has been shaken by government bailouts of the big boys and the growing certainty that the whole game is rigged.

These two tendencies are irreconcilable. If the Establishment prevails, the base defects. If the grassroots win, the “leadership” commits suicide.

What this all means in terms of the politics of foreign policy in this country is that the bipartisan interventionist consensus, which has ruled the roost in Washington since the end of World War II, is under heavy assault from both the left and the right. Whether this pincer movement can succeed in ousting the mandarins of Empire remains to be seen: but one thing we do know – it’s going to be an epic battle.

So get out the popcorn, and pull up a chair – the show’s already started!