

Romney withdraws, ensuring McCain the Republican presidential nomination

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Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney quit the presidential contest Thursday, essentially assuring that Senator John McCain of Arizona will be the presidential nominee of the Republican Party. While former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee and Congressman Ron Paul of Texas remain in the race, neither has any prospect of winning the nomination.

Romney was trailing badly after the results of the Super Tuesday primaries and caucuses, and concluded that it would be impossible to overtake McCain and win a majority of delegates to this summer's Republican National Convention.

He announced his decision to suspend his campaign in a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington DC, an annual gathering of the ultra-right and Christian fundamentalist elements who constitute the most active base of the Republican Party.

Romney made no mention of the anti-Mormon bigotry which was a major obstacle to his campaign's winning support from the Christian right during the early primaries and caucuses. Huckabee captured the lion's share of evangelical voters, splitting the ultra-right and allowing McCain, who has clashed in the past with the Christian right, to emerge as the eventual victor.

In his address to CPAC, Romney set a tone of militarism and fear-mongering that gives a glimpse of the type of campaign McCain and the Republican Party as a whole will wage in the fall. Romney lashed out at the two contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination, Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama, all but branding them as allies of Islamic terrorism.

He declared that Obama and Clinton "have made their intentions clear regarding Iraq and the war on terror: They would retreat, declare defeat. And the consequence of that would be devastating. It would mean attacks on America, launched from safe havens that would make Afghanistan under the Taliban look like child's play."

Repeating the phrase that the election was taking place "in

time of war," he said that whatever his disagreements with McCain on other issues, "I agree with him on doing whatever it takes to be successful in Iraq, and finding and executing Osama bin Laden. And I agree with him on eliminating Al Qaida and terror worldwide."

If he continued his fight for the nomination until the convention, Romney said, he would delay the launching of the Republican general election campaign. "I'd make it easier for Senator Clinton or Obama to win. Frankly, in this time of war, I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror."

This is language that goes beyond even the hysterical fear-mongering of the Bush reelection campaign in 2004, and harks back to the McCarthyite red-baiting of the 1950s.

McCain, who also spoke at the conference, was heavily booed by the attendees, particularly for his support for the bipartisan immigration legislation proposed by the Bush administration last year, which would have permitted many undocumented immigrants to attain legal status, albeit after paying heavy fines and waiting as long as 17 years to become US citizens.

The mood of racist bigotry and anti-immigrant frenzy was expressed by one CPAC attendee, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* report on the conference, who exclaimed, "McCain! He's so awful, so nasty, so selfish. It's an awful tragedy" that he is to be the Republican nominee. McCain, she continued, would "let Mexicans take over this country."

Romney's speech touched other hot-button issues dear to the extreme right, suggesting that the Democratic Party would promote pornography and sexual promiscuity, strangle the US economy with government regulation and higher taxes, reestablish welfare programs and promote dependency on government.

But his remarks were dominated by foreboding about the declining world position of American capitalism. "I'm convinced that unless America changes course," Romney said, "we could become the France of the 21st century. Still a great nation, but not the leader of the world, not the superpower. And to me that's unthinkable."

He added that “given the inevitable military ambitions of China, we must act to rebuild our military might, raise military spending to 4 percent of our GDP, purchase the most modern armament...”

Senator McCain sounded many of these same themes in his address to CPAC and in remarks prepared for delivery to a NATO security conference in Germany which he had planned to attend, then canceled to continue campaigning in primary and caucus states.

He told the CPAC conference that his prospective Democratic opponents blamed America for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. “Senator Clinton and Senator Obama will concede to our critics that our own actions to defend against its threats are responsible for fomenting the terrible evil of radical Islamic extremism, and their resolve to combat it will be as flawed as their judgment,” he said.

In a speech to a campaign rally in Norfolk, Virginia, he focused entirely on his prospective Democratic rivals, declaring, “They want to set a date for withdrawal from Iraq that I believe would have catastrophic consequences.” In other speeches, he has characterized the vague and timid proposals of Obama and Clinton for partial withdrawal of US forces from Iraq as the announcement of a “surrender date.”

The political purpose of such right-wing demagoguery is to intimidate the Democrats and cow them into downplaying as much as possible any appeal to mass antiwar sentiment, thus repeating the performance of the Kerry campaign in 2004, under conditions where popular opposition to the war, now in ending its fifth year, is even more widespread.

The Democrats fully share the imperialist goals of both McCain and the Bush administration, but there are differences over what tactics are to be employed in the pursuit of US domination of the oil-rich Middle East and Central Asia. Both Obama and Clinton, to varying degrees, have advocated greater use of diplomacy, economic pressure, covert action and political propaganda in combination with military force, even as they defend an indefinite deployment of tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq.

The Democrats represent, not the mass antiwar sentiment of millions of working people and youth, but the attitude of a sizeable section of the ruling elite itself, which has concluded that the Bush administration’s crude and bullying unilateralism has produced a political, economic and military debacle in Iraq and Afghanistan, and led to a disastrous decline in US influence around the world.

McCain has his own tactical differences with the Bush administration, particularly in relation to its alienation of the European powers, especially over such issues as the treatment of US prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. He has

criticized the administration’s torture policy, which was defended at the CPAC conference in an address by Vice President Cheney given only a few hours before McCain took the rostrum.

The main issue in dispute is not the precise methods to be used against prisoners, but the Bush administration’s ostentatious disregard for the opinion of its European allies, which McCain wishes to mobilize behind American imperialism, both in the Middle East and Central Asia, and against Russia.

In the draft of his speech to the NATO conference, published in the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, McCain called for increased use of NATO troops in Afghanistan, where Taliban and other anti-US insurgents are gaining strength, and urged countries like Germany to drop restrictions on where and how their troops can be used in that war zone.

He also called for tougher economic and political sanctions against Iran—a country whose bombing he has publicly advocated—concluding, “A military intervention, always as last means, must remain as an option on the table: Tehran must understand that it cannot win a trial of strength with the world.”

Perhaps the most provocative portion of his speech was directed against Moscow. He urged NATO to invite Croatia, Albania and Macedonia to join, and “keep open the door for democracies like the Ukraine and Georgia.” He called for integrating an independent Kosovo into the European Union and NATO—a direct affront to both Russia and its Serbian client state.

He further called for expelling Russia from the G-8 grouping of the leading industrialized powers, saying, “We should ensure that the G-8 once again becomes a club of prominent free market democracies: It should accept India and Brazil, but exclude Russia.”



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