The Washington Post endorses Obama

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The *Washington Post* endorsed Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama yesterday. Such an endorsement—by the second-most influential liberal paper after the *New York Times*, headquartered in the nation's capital, and which obtained widespread support in the 1970s for uncovering the Nixon administration's role in the Watergate affair—carries immense weight in the US political establishment.

The *Post* editorial explained that on two fundamental class questions—US economic and military policy—Obama could be safely trusted with the presidency. The reasons it gave are especially significant as the *Post*, in line with the general drift of American politics since the 1970s, has moved far to the right, notably with its unrelenting support to the US occupation of Iraq.

On the economy, the *Post* saw Obama as a conservative candidate, who would "respond to the economic crisis with a healthy respect for markets" and oppose more left-leaning elements in his own party.

The *Post* noted the fact that Obama "has surrounded himself with top-notch, experienced, centrist economic advisers [is] perhaps the best guarantee that...Mr. Obama will not ride into town determined to reinvent every policy wheel." According to Obama's comments at the October 15 presidential debate, these advisers include multibillionaire investor Warren Buffett and ex-Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker.

The paper was pleased that Obama raised no protest over the Bush administration's bitterly unpopular, multitrillion-dollar bailouts of Wall Street. It wrote, "the country will want in its president a combination of nimbleness and steadfastness—precisely the qualities Mr. Obama has displayed during the past few weeks. When he might have been scoring political points against the incumbent, he instead responsibly urged fellow Democrats in Congress to back Mr. Bush's financial rescue plan."

The *Post* added, "A silver lining of the financial crisis may be the flexibility it gives Mr. Obama to override some...in his own party who oppose open trade, as well as to pursue the entitlement reform that he surely understands is needed." In other words, the *Post* calculates that Obama would use the crisis to justify cuts in social programs like Medicare and Social Security.

In foreign policy, the *Post* concluded "the best evidence suggests that he would seek to maintain US leadership and engagement." It wrote that on "most policies, such as the need to go after al-Qaeda, check Iran's nuclear ambitions, and fight HIV/AIDS, [Obama] differs little from Mr. Bush or Mr. McCain."

Its treatment of Obama's Iraq policy is particularly significant, as Obama based his primary campaign on appeals to mass opposition to the Iraq war and criticism of the support given to it by other Democrats, such as Hillary Clinton. The *Post* writes, "Mr. Obama's greatest deviation from current policy is also our biggest worry: his insistence on withdrawing US combat troops from Iraq on a fixed timeline. Thanks to the surge Mr. Obama opposed, it may be feasible to withdraw many troops during his first two years in office."

The *Post* was clearly not overly worried, however: "if it isn't [possible to withdraw US troops]—and US generals have warned that the hard-won gains of the past 18 months could be lost by a precipitous withdrawal," the *Post* said, it could "assume that Mr. Obama would recognize the strategic importance of

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success in Iraq and adjust his plans."

Coincidentally, on the very same day the leading conservative columnist for the *New York Times*, David Brooks, issued his own appraisal of Obama. In his column "Thinking about Obama," Brooks praised Obama for being "reassuring and self-composed," writing, "He may be liberal, but he is never wild. His family is bourgeois. His instinct is to flee the revolutionary gesture in favor of the six-point plan."

Such judgments pour cold water over the panegyrics to Obama written in left-liberal circles, where the *Nation* and various left intellectuals present Obama as holding out the prospect of fundamental change. Which are more realistic: their hopes, or the assessments of Brooks, Buffett, and the *Washington Post*?

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