

Obama's cabinet selections win praise from the right

Tom Eley

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Prominent voices from the political right have endorsed President-elect Barack Obama's cabinet picks, both for his economic and national security "teams."

On November 28, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an editorial entitled "Obama's War Cabinet," which lauded President-elect Barack Obama's widely-anticipated decisions to keep Robert Gates on as Secretary of Defense and to select retired general James Jones as National Security Adviser, the top two civilian military positions in the federal government. The selections, the editorial notes, mean that Obama intends to carry on the Bush administration's military policy in Iraq and beyond.

The *Journal* writes, "These are the Administration posts most critical to the successful conduct of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to possible entanglements with Iran, North Korea and who knows who else. With these personnel picks, Mr. Obama reveals a bias for competence, experience and continuity."

In other words, the selections define an administration that will not only carry on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—i.e., "continuity,"—but that will be prepared to prosecute future wars.

The editorial celebrates the fact that the Gates selection effectively solidarizes Obama with the Bush administration's policy in Iraq, noting that it amounts to an "endorsement of President Bush's 'surge' in Iraq and its military architect, General David Petraeus," who the current Defense Secretary "championed."

This was a departure from the positions of "candidate Obama," the *Journal* points out, who "opposed the surge [and] called for a speedy withdrawal from Iraq." In this regard, the selection of James Jones, the former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, was another "reassuring get" to the *Journal*. Jones was also an advocate of the "surge" strategy in Iraq, whereby the US military drowned the Sunni resistance in blood.

The Journal infers from the selection of Gates, "President-elect Obama gave Mr. Gates some reassurances about future policy and his ability to shape it without repudiating the Secretary's record to date."

What could be involved in this quid pro quo between Gates and Obama? The *Journal* notes that "Mr. Gates has staked out positions—on missile defense in Eastern Europe, enlarging the military, and modernizing the U.S. nuclear arsenal—that are at odds with the Democratic establishment." These positions will very likely become national security hallmarks of the Obama administration.

Meanwhile, an article in Sunday's *Washington Post* paints a portrait of a president-elect set on appeasing the military brass ("Joint Chiefs Chairman 'Very Positive' After Meeting With Obama.") Obama's national security selections, including that of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as the likely Secretary of State, "have been greeted with relief at the Pentagon," the *Post* relates.

The *Post* also suggests that there is little worry among top military figures that Obama will stick to his declared agenda of withdrawing US troops from Iraq. The *Post* cites "several senior Defense Department sources [who] said that Gates, [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael] Mullen and Gen.

David H. Petraeus, head of the military's Central Command, are untroubled” by Obama’s proclaimed agenda of a troop draw-down. “These sources noted that Obama himself has said he would not be ‘careless’ about withdrawal and would retain a ‘residual’ force of unspecified size to fight terrorists and protect U.S. diplomats and civilians.”

The right-wing and military applause for Obama is a testament to the real balance of forces in American political life, in which imperialist politics dominate Washington regardless of the party affiliation of the president or Congressional majority—and in spite of mass popular opposition.

While the *Washington Post* notes that Obama “appears to be going out of his way” to ingratiate himself with a military brass “that has long mistrusted Democrats and is particularly wary of a young, intellectual leader with no experience in uniform, who once called Iraq a ‘dumb’ war,” the *Wall Street Journal* figures that the selection of Gates will provide “political insulation” from the right. “Republicans may be less willing to criticize a Defense Secretary who served GOP Presidents,” the *Journal* predicts.

Indeed, the *Journal* laughs off Obama’s own declarations about ending the war in Iraq as so much campaign rhetoric. Obama’s “pledge to remove most combat troops by 2010 leaves open exactly what he means by ‘combat’ and ‘most,’” the editorial notes. “The new status-of-forces agreement with Iraq also commits the U.S. to leave by 2011. These decisions can now be made with a view to the realities in Iraq rather than to the American campaign trail.”

The *Journal* has been joined in its praise of Obama’s national security selections by Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who, appearing on ABC’s “This Week with George Stephanopoulos,” hailed the selections as “excellent.” Lugar is among a number of leading Republicans who have closed ranks with the incipient Obama administration, including Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader, and Charles Grassley, the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee.

Leading right wing figures have also applauded Obama’s selections for his top economic advisors.

These include New York Federal Reserve president Timothy Geithner, who will be Treasury Secretary; Lawrence Summers, a former Clinton treasury secretary, who will chair the National Economic Council; Peter Orszag, who will be director of the Office of Management and Budget, and former Federal Reserve head Paul Volcker, who will lead the newly-created Economic Recovery Advisory Board. All have been hailed as “centrist” choices.

Joseph Lieberman, the renegade Democratic senator from Connecticut who campaigned feverishly on behalf of Obama’s Republican opponent, John McCain, called Obama’s economic advisors “just about perfect.” Obama intervened on behalf of Lieberman in order to preserve his position as chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee over massive rank-and-file Democratic opposition.

McCain, for his part, has been “effusive,” as one account puts it, of Obama’s likely selection for head of the Homeland Security Department, Arizona governor Janet Napolitano, a Democrat. Karl Rove, formerly the top advisor to President Bush, also praised the economic advisors in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial entitled “Thanksgiving Cheer from Obama.”



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