



Republican Party Blindness

While watching the Iowa Republican presidential primary debate, one could be forgiven for thinking that none of this had happened. With the sole exception of Ron Paul, there wasn't a single other candidate on the stage who so much as signaled regret over, much less repudiate (as Paul did), the very Republican Party agenda with which Americans became thoroughly disenchanted three years ago — an agenda to which, judging from the candidates' utterances, Republicans remain committed today.



To put it in terms of our contemporary political vernacular, President Bush's "Compassionate Conservatism" is apparently alive and well in the Republican Party of 2011. The foreign policy component of this agenda especially continues to elicit virtually unanimous, and not infrequently, impassioned, support from the establishment — whether it's in Washington or "conservative" media guises.

An [exchange](#) between former Senator [Rick Santorum](#) and [Congressman Paul](#) at the the debate in Ames, Iowa, was particularly instructive in this regard.

Santorum expressed unmitigated pride in having endorsed the Iraq War — a seemingly intractable conflict undertaken for reasons that are as dubious as its objectives have been elusive. It was this issue more so than any other that explains the angst that the nation developed toward the GOP. Yet considering that neither the other candidates — except, of course, for Ron Paul — nor anyone else who originally supported this scandalous waste of life and treasure sought to correct Santorum, it is more reasonable than not to suppose that his pride over this eight-year war is also theirs.

In addition to this, Santorum gave expression to precisely the sort of hysteria over the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran that informed our entry into Iraq. That is, he not-so-subtly indicated a readiness to involve America in another military adventure in the Middle East. Inferring from the silence of his competitors — again, excepting Ron Paul — and the "conservative" media's verdict that Santorum "schooled" Paul on the need for America to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, the GOP has emphatically *not* amended its ways, its protestations to the contrary aside.

Then, just two days following the debate, [Rick Perry](#) formally entered the presidential race.

Leaving aside for the moment Perry's record, there are a few simple considerations in connection to his candidacy that reinforce the impression conveyed by the Santorums of the Republican Party that the latter hasn't learned a blessed thing from its misfortunes.



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 17, 2011

First, like President Bush, Perry has served as the Governor of Texas. This alone suffices to send chills up the spines of untold numbers of people for whom “Bush” remains a four-letter word in more ways than one. Even if this is where the comparisons between Bush and Perry ended, considering the extent to which Bush fatigue continues to inform perceptions of the Republican Party, they are enough to damage Perry’s candidacy.

Second, Perry is *not* just another Texas Governor; it was by way of first serving as *the Lieutenant-governor* of Bush that he *became* Governor. In other words, Perry had a very close working relationship with the forty-third President.

Third, Perry was recruited and groomed by the same GOP fixer that justly became known as “the architect” of Bush’s presidency.

Fourth, Perry once referred to Bush as his “[philosophical soul mate](#).” This is particularly telling. As far as I have been able to determine, Perry has never revoked this judgment. Presumably, what this means is that Perry and Bush share the same vision of the world — and, thus, the same vision of politics. And what *this* in turn evidently suggests is that while Perry has implicitly criticized the former President for his self-identification as a “compassionate conservative,” he is disposed to govern similarly to the manner in which his predecessor governed — i.e. *as a “compassionate conservative.”* That is, he is not likely to govern as any kind of conservative at all.

To this last point, the objection may be raised that inasmuch as he has presided over the creation of 40 percent of all of the private-sector jobs in America, Perry has been a remarkably successful — and conservative — Governor. This line invites more than one possible reply. Yet for now, we need note only that Bush was a very successful and reasonably conservative Governor as well. After all, when the latter declared his commitment to a more “humble” foreign policy and “across-the-board” tax cuts during his first campaign for the White House, there was at least nothing obvious in his gubernatorial record that would have forced us to call his sincerity into question.

In truth, though, Santorum and Perry aren’t really the issue here. The issue is that Republicans still refuse to grasp both the extent to which the country persists in distrusting them as well as *why* it distrusts them. I single out the two Ricks only because they are the most recent figures to epitomize this party-wide obliviousness.



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