



Written by on November 6, 2008

A Look at Obama's Likely Cabinet Picks

Journalist Alexander Burns, in a November 6 article for The Politico, a Washington, D.C.-based news organization, offered his opinion: "If the soon-to-be 44th president wants to draw on the expertise of the Democratic Party's foreign-policy establishment, three names likely would be at the top of his State Department short list: New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, former United Nations ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and Massachusetts Sen. John F. Kerry [The New American's "Freedom Index" score: 13 percent]."*



What is very interesting, should this assessment be correct, is the contrast between the names on the short list and Barack Obama's (Freedom Index score: 11 percent) campaign slogan: "Change." Since the presumed inference of the slogan "change" is a stark break from the failed policies of the Bush administration, one would naturally assume that Obama would draw his key cabinet officials from an entirely different personnel pool than did Bush and his predecessors. Yet Richardson, Holbrooke, and Kerry all share membership in a common organization that has sent forth its members to fill the ranks of not only the Bush administration, but a large number of its predecessors. That organization is the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

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As for the significance of the CFR in U.S. foreign policy, consider this list of secretaries of state who have been CFR members, with the party affiliation of the administration in which they served in parentheses following each:

Edward Stettinius (D), George Marshall (D), Dean Acheson (D), John Foster Dulles (R), Christian Herter (R), Dean Rusk (D), William Rogers (R), Henry Kissinger (R), Cyrus Vance (D), Edmund Muskie (D), Alexander Haig (R), George Shultz (R), James Baker (R), Lawrence Egelberger (R), Warren Christopher (D), William Richardson (R), Madeleine Albright (D), Colin Powell (R), and Condoleezza Rice (R).

Those unfamiliar with the CFR might be tempted to regard the dominance of the organization's members in the secretary-of-state post as coincidental — maybe akin to finding graduates of Ivy League law schools among the members of our nation's leading law firms. Consider then, the words of one of the most influential CFR members of all times, Professor Carroll Quigley of Georgetown University, who was once Bill Clinton's mentor. In his book, *Tragedy and Hope*, Quigley wrote:

The two parties should be almost identical, so that the American people can throw the rascals out at any election without leading to any profound or extensive shifts in policy.

Continuing, Quigley theorized:

It should be possible to replace it, every four years if necessary, by the other party, which ... will still pursue, with new vigor, approximately the same basic policies.



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Consider just the area of U.S. foreign policy. George Bush's secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, is a CFR member, and Rice's predecessor in that post, Collin Powell (who endorsed Obama for the presidency), is a CFR member, and each of Obama's possible picks are also CFR members. What is the likelihood for any significant policy change under President Obama?

However, additional cabinet posts have also been discussed in the media. In an article written for Gannett News Service on November 6, five potential candidates for secretary of the treasury were cited: Timothy Geithner, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Sheila Bair, Republican chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.; James Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase and an Obama economic adviser; Larry Summers, Bill Clinton's Treasury secretary and also an Obama economic adviser; and Paul Volcker, who was the chairman of the Federal Reserve during the Carter and Reagan administrations. Everyone on the list, except for Sheila Barr, is a CFR member.

For the position of Defense secretary, the Gannett article presents five individuals as likely Obama choices: Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) (Freedom Index score: 44 percent); current Defense Secretary Robert Gates; Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) (Freedom Index score: 25 percent); Retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark; and Richard Danzig, Obama's top national security adviser. Again four of the five — all but Danzig — are CFR members.

For the position of secretary of state, the Gannett article mentioned two other candidates to those listed by The Politico, including Susan Rice, Obama's top foreign-policy adviser. Not surprising, this Ms. Rice, like the present Secretary Rice, is a CFR member. Not very much change there.

A November 5 article from Bloomberg news repeated the selection of Obama economic adviser and Clinton Treasury Secretary Larry Summers as a likely pick to resume his old post. Bloomberg also quoted Senator Jack Reed as favoring the continuation of Robert Gates as Defense Secretary. "He's done an extraordinary job," said Reed. "I would hope that in some capacity he could continue to serve."

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell's name surfaced again in an article in *Time* magazine. *Time* writer Mark Halperin reported that Obama is considering asking Powell to serve as Secretary of Education.

Usually the first order of business for a president-elect, however, is selecting a chief of staff. On November 5, Bloomberg (and other news sources) named Representative Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) (Freedom Index score: 8 percent) as a likely candidate. Sure enough, the next day, major news sources announced that Emanuel, the fourth ranking Democrat in the House, had accepted the post. House GOP leader John Boehner of Ohio described Emanuel as "an ironic choice for a president-elect who has promised to change Washington, make politics more civil, and govern from the center." Emanuel is known for his sometimes blunt mannerisms, and his Freedom Index score of 8 percent places him far from the political "center."

* *"The Freedom Index" is a congressional scorecard based on the U.S. Constitution.*



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