

**“PUBLIC OPINION OF  
POLITICS AS USUAL  
(AND UNUSUAL)”**

**“THE ILLUSION OF GOVERNANCE”**

As it has become obvious, this election has put a hiatus on work getting done and legislation being passed in this city. Congressmen and policy researchers alike have expressed their dissatisfaction with this trend. Yet aside from a stagnation in the functioning of government, there is little reason for such opposition and friction between ranking members of each party. We are in a time where it is the norm to attack members of the other party rather than reach understanding and compromise. Even the word compromise causes a sense of inauspicious fear. The explanation for this goes back to the fact that party systems have grown too large and powerful. They are acting in a way which promotes their own success but appears to neglect good governance. More dangerous is that their main goal is to make the other suffer. These are things George Washington warned about in his farewell address. However, in recent years there has been a shift toward this type of activity occurring within the parties as well. Even more dangerous.

There are countless examples of this in the headlines each and every day, most often amongst Conservatives. One of the more blatant of this was when members of the Republican Party from the same generation have harshly criticized candidate Romney. This type of internal rivalry inhibits candidates from being able to talk about the real issues and maintain a quality platform. It is interesting though that there are instances where Romney is being bashed by former contenders. Overwhelmingly it is in his foreign policy. Several reasons could explain this. It may be due to Romney's business background or his lack of foreign policy experience. I will argue below that there is much more to this issue. I believe that the candidate is trying to assemble a representative cross section of conservative approaches to foreign policy which, apart from believing that the US is "exceptional," have many internal disagreements.

There is an intriguing study on this blending of conservative ideals. In my exploration on this topic one of the more astute analyses I have come across is James Mann's *The Rise of the Vulcans*. This book provides great detail of the creation and performance of Bush administration's foreign policy team. It starts with Bush's introduction to Dr. Condoleezza Rice to assist with his exploratory work in 1999 and goes well into his war cabinet. Mann's central aim is to examine the interactions of the careers of these individuals who came to be called "the Vulcans." Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, who previously worked close together in the Ford administration, are examples. For Mann, these two evolve over time from pragmatic realists to enablers of Neo-conservatives with a more aggressive bent. While fierce competitors for political status, these gentlemen complemented each other well as policy makers. On the other end of the spectrum was Colin Powell, a career military man, who provided more cautious insight to security issues and represented the realist and pragmatic faction. These thinkers take the world as it is and suggest that it is unwise to waste resources in foreign adventures. Mann ultimately concludes that although the Vulcans were highly intelligent and experienced, they never really could find any collective cohesion.

The clash came as a result of the mix of Realists and Neo-cons. The Neo-cons firmly believe in asserting America's military strength and having the country behave as a proper hegemon. These types are far from idealists, although Paul Wolfowitz, an academic and Deputy Secretary of Defense, stressed the importance of spreading democracy and its benefits throughout the world. As a prototypical Neo-con, however, he believed that it could, and should, be spread by military force. Rice, the National Security Adviser, fit into the middle of these personalities and completed the group. She too came from an academic background and essentially sided more with the realist mentality. She shared another Vulcans' assumption that nations should act in accordance with self-interests rather than a moral or ideological foundation. But the team also all believed that U.S. military power is central to foreign policy and most thought key to the spread of democracy. They believed that the U.S. is a force for good globally. Iraq was to be the test case for convergence of the Realists and Neo-con assumptions. The most overly optimistic theme and ultimately the undoing of the Vulcans' cohesion was the assuredness in America's capabilities to transform the world. While the Vulcans wished to bring a new assertiveness to American Foreign Policy, the realities of war and human error tested their ambitious plans. The book in essence analyzes why their ideas both brought them together but then, through Iraq, ultimately drove Realists and Neo-Cons apart.

The conclusion is that the Vulcans, and those like them, have their own thoughts as to what constitutes conservatism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main idea remains that this group promotes U.S. supremacy through engagement and spreading democracy. Mann leaves it an unfinished work though as time will tell the actual successes or failures of Bush's foreign policy decisions. Many people argue that America's foreign policy entirely changed after the end of the Cold War. However, after reading this book it is clear, that moment was merely an instance among many in the molding of the Neo-conservative movement. The interactions of these people would later be drafted into the administration that would be tested like never before about America's true power. It is a fascinating read and really captures the personalities that often inform the debate that conservatives are still experiencing.

From *The Rise of the Vulcans* I think there is a takeaway message and perhaps a warning. What candidate Romney is doing is trying to bring in different ideologies to be part of his policy team. It is the same mix of Neo-cons and Realists that we saw before. He may be doing this to show that he is not too far right or siding with solely one group. This is extremely smart to rake in votes. However, he needs to carefully consider how these mentalities might potentially clash because there are many commentators who will seek to drive a wedge in the campaign. Interestingly, several of his foreign policy advisers were once VP Cheney aides, so Romney maintains this tie to the previous administration. Already we have reports of disputes within the campaign staff over foreign policy. Nonetheless, Romney needs to align with a specific view and a specific goal for foreign policy and hold true to it. From my analysis I have found that friction from within only makes it easier to attack from the outside and thus discredit it as dysfunctional. Simply put, there is still a disagreement between conservative ideologies concerning foreign policy principles, especially over U.S. engagement and whether or not to use force in certain instances. There does not appear to be any unifying point for the GOP in the near future so the question becomes whether or not we have learned from our past as we prepare for the future.

