

Pseudo-Democrats by Michael Carmichael

September 28, 2010

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}p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal { margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt; font-size: 12pt; font-family: "Times New Roman";
}table.MsoNormalTable { font-size: 10pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }div.Section1 { page: Section1; }ol { margin-bottom: 0in; }ul { margin-bottom: 0in; }Yesterday, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) issued a widely distributed report on a survey that focused on national security as a campaign issue in 2010. The GQR report was intriguingly titled, "Making the Case on National Security as Elections Approach: New Democracy Corps-Third Way National Security Survey Shows Opportunities for Progressives to Make an Effective Case on the Obama Record and Vision on National Security."
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Periodically, GQR publishes branded reports of this nature in their efforts to shape the Democratic-progressive dialogue, messaging and official policy at critical junctures in the omnipresent election cycles. National Security is such a cherished theme of GQR and its subsidiaries that they should be equated with the right-wing organizations: American Enterprise Institute and the nascent Foreign Policy Initiative, that solely exist to advocate military interventionism instead of diplomacy.

One of the principals of GQR, Jeremy Rosner, prides himself in his own self-defined label as a, "liberal hawk." Rosner co-authored a book, "With All Our Might: A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty," that was published with much 'New Democrat' fanfare in 2006. "With All Our Might," was little more than an embarrassing but predictable paean to neoconservative dogma laced with Islamophobia aimed at a "progressive" Democratic audience during the now infamous Bush Era.

The latest GQR effort to shape Democratic messaging (and policy) on national security is particularly unimpressive and no less synthetic than Rosner's earlier literary efforts. The survey was based on a shallow and elliptical questionnaire that deliberately failed to ask crucial questions. The result is an absurd and worthless document that does little more than explore the transparent strategy driving GQR and its subsidiaries:

- To move: the progressive base in the USA; the platform of the Democratic Party and official government policy to the right in order to transform the American center and left into a political bloc that is indistinguishable from Reaganite neoconservatism.

For example, even though the survey produced results favoring President Obama's handling of crucial national security policies vis a vis: ending the war in Iraq; his conduct of the war in Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – GQR does not -- repeat does not recommend citing these achievements in progressive messaging. Instead, GQR proposes that progressives should stress:

- Steps taken by the administration to improve military service,
- The number of Al-Qaeda captured and killed since President Obama took office and
- The public popularity for the continuation of the Afghanistan war effort.

The last point is certainly the most curious, although the first two are conundrums as well. While the survey produced results indicating support for the current Afghanistan strategy – the questionnaire did not include any attempt to explore the basis of this support. Neither did the survey include one single question about the most debated topic of President Obama's Afghanistan policy – his imposition of a deadline in July 2011 for the current "surge" in counter-insurgency operations and the commencement of the reduction of the number of troops. An omission this glaring on such a critical and topical issue reveals the fundamental weakness in the latest branded survey by GQR. The agenda driving the thrust of this document is a thinly disguised attempt to morph the progressive movement into a grassroots pro-war campaign in order to neutralize its opposition to Republican neoconservatism. This is purely and simply neoconservatism by stealth – stealth neoconservatism.

In reporting on the GQR survey, David Wood, Chief Military Correspondent for Politics Daily titled his column, "Afghan War Mission Still Unclear Democratic Group's Poll Finds." Wood even quoted the GQR report, "The lack of clarity about our mission in Afghanistan could endanger continuing public support for the war effort." While Wood's analysis is perceptive for citing the report's peculiar handling of US opinion on Afghanistan, he did not cite the absence of any attempt to examine, analyze or probe the public perception of the most contentious aspect of President Obama's policy: a firm date for the inception of a draw down of troops in July 2011.

The deliberate limitations of this survey were not confined to the war in Afghanistan. In GQR's attempt to analyze the President's policy for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, there was zero effort to dissect public opinion on Israel or Palestine. The report is barren of any interest in why the President's peace process is popular, or why the current Israeli-Palestinian situation concerns the American public. There was not one single question about General Petraeus' statements before the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict foments and incites anti-American sentiment on a global scale and endangers US troops.

A third example: while exploring public attitudes about the "mosque controversy" in New York, GQR made no attempt to analyze why the majority of Americans do not support government intervention into an otherwise local matter. GQR offered no question on the First Amendment/religious freedom dimension of the controversy. There was no question about the attitudes of Americans to Muslims. There was no question about the facts that there is no mosque involved and the site for the building is not on Ground Zero. The lack of depth of its survey left GQR with the extremely weak recommendation to ignore the core of this issue -- just as the rest of the survey ignored the core of other issues from war in Afghanistan to peace in the Middle East.

It seems likely that GQR found the mosque issue to be particularly complex at least partly because of the Islamophobic subtext littering previous statements and publications of the DLC and its sometimes outspoken members. For example, Al From, the Founder of the Democratic Leadership Council, made numerous trips to Israel where he was treated like a visiting potentate. Mr. From reported his observations in the Holy Land on the DLC website where he described the attitudes of Israelis and Palestinians in starkly contrasting terms – ie. predictably enthusiastic compliments for the martial activities of Israel versus predictably critical and derogatory comments for those of the Palestinians. On the DLC website, Mr. From is described in rather peculiar terms:

Al From is one of America's premier strategists and policy entrepreneurs with a track record of injecting innovative ideas into the national debate, turning major national institutions around, and changing the course of American life. His new venture, The From Company, LLC, offers strategic advice to private clients.

Quite.

There were many other flaws in the latest GQR report rendering it absolutely useless for progressive messaging in particular or any other conceivable purpose – except for one, the analysis of its own internal agenda. While the report is a perfectly feckless document for its purported purpose, it does provide deep insight into the agenda of GQR and its latest “progressive” brands, Democracy Corps and Third Way.

First, a little history: GQR rose to prominence in parallel with the rise of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the principal organ of the New Democrat movement that emerged in the wake of the Dukakis campaign in 1988. The DLC led the corporate movement to Reaganize the Democratic Party in order to prevent debate on the fundamental social, economic and political issues in American society. Al From was the DLC's fearless founder and its first and foremost, “policy entrepreneur.”

Over the course of the past 22 years, the DLC persistently drove Democratic messaging to the Reaganite right. The Clinton administration produced policies consistent with this trend that would lead to the euphemistically titled, ‘welfare reform’ that was simply the deletion of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and the carving back of social programs designed to empower the poor and impoverished. This counter-intuitive ideological trend set the stage for the deregulation of the banking and financial industries – policies that are not inconsistent with the laissez faire ideology of Ronald Reagan.

Over the course of time, the Democratic base – ie. the progressives, the poor, the young, women and minorities, became alienated since they were the economic victims of the decline of traditional Democratic values within the Party that rose to power through the progressive reforms of FDR.

While the Democratic ticket captured the election of 1992, the Reaganite backlash of 1994 forced a political realignment. In the mid-1990s, Dick Morris, a right-leaning political consultant, commandeered President Clinton's strategic agenda and steered the course of the ship of state even further to the right prior to his highly publicized fall from grace at the Democratic National Convention in 1996. In 1995, Morris and From had been successful in launching the Blue Dog Coalition, a Reaganite rump inside the Democratic Party, a hostile ideological parasite that represents nothing less than a cancer growing within the body politic of the progressive Party of FDR, JFK, LBJ and Jimmy Carter.

By the late 1990s, an internal backlash uncoiled as disaffected Democrats began to organize their own progressive movement. A new generation of organizations emerged to counterbalance the rightward tilt and its corporatist epicenter, the DLC. Moveon skyrocketed to prominence from the tempestuous scandal centering on the Republican witchhunt into the claims of Monica Lewinsky that led to the impeachment of President Clinton. Anticipating a new trend back toward traditional FDR-style progressivism, GQR launched a new brand in 1999, Democracy Corps, designed to appeal to the progressive base although it would be resolutely pseudo-progressive, ie. progressive in name only.

The loss of the presidential election of 2000 delivered a harsh blow to the New Democrats, the DLC and Blue Dog brands. Faced with 9/11 and the stratospheric popularity of neoconservatism, the DLC soon found itself back in its comfortable Reaganite niche. This development led to massive Democratic losses in 2002 and 2004. In 2006, the decline of neoconservatism was apparent as the progressive movement found traction in opposition to the peculiar ideology of the Bush-Cheney administration. Following the developments that crescendoed with the resurgence of the progressive base and the election of Barack Obama, the political landscape changed dramatically. Today in 2010, the discredited “New Democrat” brands are still trying to appeal to the Democratic base with transparent attempts to rebrand neoconservative ideology as ‘progressive.’ As usual, GQR is simply running true to its characteristic form and purveying Reaganite propaganda promoting neoconservatism via stealth.

While it is easy to discount the GQR brands as pseudo-progressive, it is instructive to note that one of the principals of the firm, James Carville, remains prominent in official Democratic branding. Carville is an ingenious ex-Marine who used the GI bill to earn a law degree, but he chose to enter political consulting in the Reaganite South.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Carville's brash personal style and his slogan, "It's the Economy, Stupid" gained him a national audience where he reigns as a populist pundit and successful stand-up comedian who frequents mainstream media with pithy commentaries. Make no mistake. Carville and his branded colleagues are packaging a Reaganite agenda for an audience of largely young, Southern, uneducated and under-privileged people susceptible to the rustic traditions and prejudices he espouses so glibly.

Bottom line: GQR's brands are nothing less than pseudo-progressive propaganda devices of a very rank order that should be rejected by everybody with the capacity for rational discourse and jettisoned by American voters as brazen attempts to deceive the public.

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