



Why Joe Lieberman was a True Neoconservative

Description

US : Joe Lieberman, who died on Wednesday at age 82, was in many ways a classic neoconservative—a stalwart exponent of a hawkish foreign policy and a liberal domestic one during his decades-long service in the Senate.

As the first Orthodox Jew to serve in the Senate, he was widely seen as an influential Jewish voice in national politics for many decades. His hawkish instincts remained undiminished to the end as he served as chairman of the organization United Against Nuclear Iran and championed Israel.

Lieberman was born on February 24, 1942. His story became the classic one of Jewish immigrant success. He attended Yale University, a former WASP preserve, and also earned a law degree there in 1967.

A successful lawyer, he ran for state attorney general in 1982 before going on to run for the Senate in 1988, where he helped strengthen the Clean Air Act but also earned the ire of liberals for supporting a reduction in the capital gains tax.

Throughout, Lieberman refused to cater to the liberal wing of the Democratic party. Lieberman raised eyebrows among Democrats when he publicly attacked President Bill Clinton for his dalliance with Monica Lewinsky, declaring, “Such behavior is not just inappropriate. It is immoral.” In the end, Clinton’s sexual escapades helped cost Gore and Lieberman the presidency in 2000.

In 1997, the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom awarded Lieberman, along with his longtime friend Senator John McCain, the Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his efforts.

The award arrived at a moment when Lieberman, together with a number of other Jewish legislators, had taken a leading role during the 1990s in helping to support the beleaguered Bosnia against Serbian aggression.

Lieberman had pushed for lifting an arms embargo on Bosnia, co-sponsoring with Senator Bob Dole measures aimed at helping the country, including the 1995 Bosnia and Herzegovina Self-Defense Act.

The passage of the measure played a key role in prompting the Clinton administration to alter its hands-off policy, which had been originally promoted by both Secretary of State Warren Christopher and National Security Adviser Tony Lake at the outset of the administration.

Lieberman was also a staunch supporter of the Second Iraq War, which a number of ebullient liberal hawks, fresh from their triumphs in the Balkans, viewed as the next campaign against tyranny and aggression abroad.

Lieberman never wavered on the war—in 2007, he voted with Republicans to oppose the withdrawal of U.S. troops from that disastrous conflict. His unflinching support for the Bush administration's policies brought him into bad odor among Connecticut Democrats, and he successfully ran as an independent for the Senate in 2006.

He went on to champion John McCain's run for the presidency in 2008—a somersault from his own path-breaking run in 2000 as Al Gore's running mate for the presidency. McCain contemplated selecting Lieberman as his running-mate before landing upon Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska.

"I have not always fit comfortably into conventional political boxes," Lieberman declared as his Senate service came to a close. Indeed, he did not.

His final political act was to become co-chair of the maverick group No Labels, an organization that many Democrats believe exists primarily to scotch the prospects of President Joe Biden in 2024 as he runs against Republican candidate Donald J. Trump.

Lieberman was, nonetheless, unsparing in his criticism of the former president. "Many people say he's a threat to democracy," he said. "But to me, what he's really a threat to is the rule of law, which is the great guarantor of our freedom, of order, of our prosperity, of everything." He was combative until the very end.

by Jacob Heilbrunn

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