

# What Would Jesse Do?

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By [Joseph P. Duggan](#) on 2.9.09 @ 6:08AM

WASHINGTON -- Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Hillary Clinton now control the machinery of United States foreign policy and diplomacy. John Kerry is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A latter-day Bella Abzug, New York's Representative Nita Lowey, chairs the House Appropriations subcommittee for foreign affairs, handling the cash for the coming surge in international social engineering and "gender awareness."

President Obama and Secretary Clinton's first international policy gesture to a world anxious over war, terrorism and economic crisis was to make taxpayers' dollars available to abortionists. Except for the absence of ticker tape, one might have mistaken the rites of euphoria amid the permanent bureaucracies at the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development for Times Square on V-E Day.

Conservatives -- notably those whose prime concerns are social issues and the pro-life cause -- are shut out of influence. Or are they? This is the moment for conservatives, and especially for the surviving specimens of the breed in the United States Senate, to ask: What would Jesse do?

The late Sen. Jesse Helms thrived on adversity. Through his conviction and sense of purpose, his mastery of Senate rules and parliamentary procedure, and his willingness to endure the opprobrium of both liberal Democrats and invertebrate Republicans, Helms became one of the most consequential figures of his generation in U.S. foreign policy.

Just after Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, I heard Helms address an exuberant crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference. Speaking of the ousted Carter Administration, Helms said, "We don't have a foreign policy. We have a foreign policy process." He also remarked that the State Department "has a 'desk' for every country in the world except for the United States of America. Ronald Reagan's first priority should be to establish an 'American Desk' at the State Department."

With a flourish of Southern populism, Helms said that career officers at State had asked him if it were true that the Reagan transition team was speaking of "taking a broom" to the Department. Helms said, "No, we'll use a vacuum cleaner."

Helms was ever so right about the primacy of process in Foggy Bottom. Twenty-eight years and five presidents later, his observation rings just as true. Instead of probing for the intellectual and spiritual core of America's estrangement from the rest of the world, the foreign policy establishment at the dawn of the Obama Age fixates on reorganization, and of course on more spending and bureaucratic empire building, as substitutes for true reform.

The best the establishment is offering is far from sufficient. The bipartisan "Project for National Security Reform" led by a wise old hand, David Abshire, has recommended what it believes to be, and to some extent probably are, needed organizational changes to update the structure created by the National Security Act of 1947. The establishment at its worst offers another proposal led by a trio of former administrators of the U.S. Agency for International Development, seeking to swell the coffers and "elevate" this anachronistic spending machine into a Cabinet department.

As for the "American Desk," the U.S. Mission to the United Nations under Jeane Kirkpatrick's robust leadership during the Reagan Administration was as close as we'll ever get to this ideal.

And the vacuum cleaner? The industrial-strength model that Helms seemed to have in mind was never utilized. Conservatives had to be content with the occasional use of a senatorial dust-buster to stop a messy nomination or policy from becoming too unsightly.

Though *post hoc* may not signify *propter hoc*, it is at least a coincidence that the George W. Bush Administration foreign policy -- and "personnel as policy" -- descended irreversibly into utopian incoherence after Jesse Helms left Washington in 2002.

For his success using the "hold" to delay or kill legislation and objectionable nominations for ambassadorships and policy positions, Helms was known by both friend and foe as "Senator No."

Less noted was the effectiveness of the Senate Democrats' own Great Naysayer -- Chris Dodd of Connecticut -- during the George W. Bush years. Dodd led Democratic efforts that halted the nominations of Otto Reich as assistant secretary of state for Latin America; and of John Klink and Ellen Sauerbrey as head of the State Department bureau for "population affairs." The biggest prey Dodd bagged was John Bolton, blocked from confirmation as Ambassador to the United Nations.

Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton will nominate as ambassadors and as top policy officials enemies of the unborn, traditional marriage, and the family. This will tend to exacerbate the "clash of civilizations" dividing the secular leftist governing class of the United States from traditional Catholic communities in Latin America and Eastern Europe and conservative Muslim societies in the Middle East and Africa.

The Senate needs a new conservative champion of foreign policy realism who will, to paraphrase Bill Buckley, stand athwart extremist nominees and noxious legislation, yelling "Stop!"