

The Dangerous Neocon-R2P Alliance

Exclusive: After U.S. neocons helped stir up a crisis in Ukraine, with a big assist from the biased American press corps the Obama administration looked for a diplomatic off-ramp, but this pattern of hyped outrage and belated reconciliation is a risky way to make foreign policy, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The American mainstream news media has rarely bought in so thoroughly to a U.S. government propagandea campaign as it has in taking sides in support of the post-coup government in Ukraine and against Russia and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Part of this is explained by the longstanding animus toward Russian President Vladimir Putin for his autocratic style, his shirtless photographs and his government's opposition to gay rights. Another part is a hangover from the Cold War when the Russkies were the enemy. In Official Washington, there is palpable nostalgia for the days of Ronald Reagan's anticommunist swagger and "Red Dawn" fantasies.

But another reason for the biased coverage from the U.S. press corps is the recent fusion of the still-influential neoconservatives with more liberal "responsibility to protect" (R2P) activists who believe in "humanitarian" military interventions. The modern mainstream U.S. news media is dominated by these two groups: neocons on the right and R2Pers on the center-left.

As one longtime Washington observer told me recently the neocons are motivated by two things, love of Israel and hatred of Russia. Meanwhile, the R2Pers are easily enamored of idealistic young people in street protests.

The two elements of this alliance the neocons and the R2Pers also now represent the dominant foreign policy establishment in Official Washington, with the few remaining "realists" largely shoved to the side, including to some degree President Barack Obama who has "realist" tendencies in seeking to limit use of U.S. military power but continues to cede control over his administration's actions abroad to aggressive neocon-R2P operatives.

During Obama's first term, he made the fateful decision to create a "team of rivals" of powerful political and bureaucratic figures the likes of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and General David Petraeus. They skillfully funneled the President into hawkish decisions that they wanted, such as a "surge" of 30,000 troops into Afghanistan and a major confrontation with Iran over its nuclear program. (Both positions were pushed by

the neocons.)

In 2011, the neocons and the R2Pers teamed up for the war against Libya, which was sold to the United Nations Security Council as simply a limited intervention to protect civilians in the east whom Muammar Gaddafi had labeled “terrorists.” However, once the U.S.-orchestrated military operation got going, it quickly turned into a “regime change” war, eliminating longtime neocon nemesis, Gaddafi, to Hillary Clinton’s hawkish delight.

In Obama’s second term, the original “team of rivals” is gone, but foreign policy is being defined by the likes of Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, a neocon, and Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, a leading R2Per, with a substantial supporting role by neocon Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona. Obama defeated McCain in 2008, but McCain now is pulling the strings of Secretary of State John Kerry, who also appears enamored of the hawkish stances demanded by Nuland and Power.

Power was a passionate advocate for bombing Syria to degrade the military capabilities of President Bashar al-Assad who is in the midst of a bloody civil war. For her part, Nuland threw the weight of the U.S. government behind Ukrainian protesters who with crucial help from neo-Nazi militias ousted elected (but corrupt) President Viktor Yanukovich in February.

To the surprise of many people who knew Kerry in his early days as a Vietnam veteran against the war and as an aggressive Senate investigator in the 1980s Kerry has consistently taken the side of the neocons and the R2Pers. As Secretary of State since February 2013, he also has built a dubious reputation for himself as someone who rushes to judgments and disregards evidence when the facts are inconvenient. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“What’s the Matter with John Kerry?”](#)]

Sarin Attack

After a sarin gas attack last Aug. 21 outside Damascus, Kerry jumped to the conclusion that Assad’s government was at fault despite serious doubts within the U.S. intelligence community and among independent analysts. Then, without presenting a shred of verifiable evidence, he gave a bellicose speech on Aug. 30 claiming repeatedly that “we know” that the regime did it.

Though it still has not been ascertained whether regime forces or the rebels were responsible, it is now clear that Kerry was wrong in asserting U.S. government certainty, especially after a team of rocket scientists determined that the one rocket found to carry sarin had a maximum range of about two kilometers, much less than was needed to fit with Kerry’s claims.

One of those scientists, MIT's Theodore Postol, told MintPress News that "According to our analysis, I would not ... claim that I know who executed the attack, but it's very clear that John Kerry had very bad intelligence at best or, at worst, lied about the intelligence he had."

Postol compared Kerry's presentation to the Bush-43 administration's assertions about Iraq possessing WMD in 2002-03 and the Johnson administration citing the Gulf of Tonkin incident to justify escalation of the Vietnam War in 1964. Postol also noted the failure of the U.S. press to question the U.S. government's accusations against Syria.

"To me, the fact that people are not focused on how the administration lied is very disturbing and shows how far the community of journalists and the community of so-called security experts has strayed from their responsibility," Postol said. "The government so specifically distorted the evidence that it presented a very real danger to the country and the world. I am concerned about the collapse of traditional journalism and the future of the country."

Just this week, Kerry further augmented his new reputation as a person who doesn't check his facts and simply spouts propaganda. On Thursday, after a Geneva conference called to tamp down tensions in Ukraine, Kerry rhetorically poured fuel on the fire by citing a claim about pro-Russian demonstrators in eastern Ukraine threatening local Jews.

"Just in the last couple of days, notices were sent to Jews in one city indicating that they had to identify themselves as Jews. And obviously, the accompanying threat implied is or threatened or suffer the consequences, one way or the other," Kerry said.

"In the year 2014, after all of the miles traveled and all of the journey of history, this is not just intolerable; it's grotesque. It is beyond unacceptable. And any of the people who engage in these kinds of activities, from whatever party or whatever ideology or whatever place they crawl out of, there is no place for that."

However, in the days before Kerry spoke, the distribution of the leaflet in Donetsk had been denounced as a black-propaganda hoax designed to discredit the pro-Russian protesters.

A Reported Hoax

As JTA, "the Global Jewish News Source," reported on Wednesday, "Pro-Russian separatists from Donetsk in eastern Ukraine denied any involvement in the circulation of fliers calling on Jews to register with separatists and pay special taxes." Among those denying the legitimacy of the fliers was Denis

Pushilin, the person whose name was signed at the bottom. He termed the fliers a “provocation” designed to discredit the resistance in eastern Ukraine against the post-coup regime in Kiev.

The issue of anti-Semitism has been a sensitive one for the Kiev regime because neo-Nazi militias played a key role in overthrowing President Yanukovich on Feb. 22, and now renamed as Ukraine’s “National Guard” these militias have joined in the repression of the protests in eastern Ukraine, including the killing of three protesters this week.

The right-wing Svoboda party and the Right Sektor, which spearheaded the decisive attacks that forced Yanukovich to flee for his life, trace their political lineage back to Stepan Bandera, a World War II Nazi collaborator whose paramilitary force took part in the extermination and expulsion of Jews and Poles to ethnically purify Ukraine.

So, the distribution of anti-Semitic fliers would have served an important political purpose for the Kiev regime by allowing it and its American backers to deflect questions about neo-Nazis in the west by fingering pro-Russians in the east for anti-Semitism. The men who passed out the leaflets were dressed up as pro-Russian paramilitaries but their identities are unknown.

On Friday, the New York Times sought to dispute the possibility that the men might have been pro-Kiev provocateurs by arguing that “there is no evidence” that pro-Kiev operatives are functioning in Donetsk.

But the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy has on its payroll a number of activists and “journalists” operating in Donetsk and elsewhere in the east, according to NED’s list of 65 projects in Ukraine. Founded in 1983, NED took over in a quasi-public fashion many of the covert operations formerly run by the CIA.

Last September, NED’s neocon president Carl Gershman wrote an op-ed for the Washington Post that called Ukraine “the biggest prize,” the capture of which could ultimately lead to the ouster of Putin, who “may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

By citing the suspect flier without noting that its supposed author had already denied its authenticity, Kerry reinforced the growing impression that he is an erratic and biased if not dishonest diplomat.

Obama’s Equivocation

Obama’s role in his administration’s foreign policy fiascos has mostly been to be caught off guard by mischief that his independent-minded underlings

have stirred up. Then, once a crisis is touched off and the propaganda machinery starts churning out hyperbolic alarms Obama joins in the rhetorical exaggerations before he tries, quietly, to work out some compromise.

In other words, rather than driving the agenda, Obama goes with the neocon-R2P flow before searching for a last-second off-ramp to avert catastrophe. That creates what looks like a disorganized foreign policy consisting of much tough talk but little actual hard power. The cumulative effect has been to make Obama appear weak and indecisive.

One example was Syria, where Obama drew a "red line" suggesting a U.S. military strike if Assad's regime used chemical weapons. When sarin was used on Aug. 21 resulting in hundreds of deaths, Official Washington's neocons and R2Pers quickly fingered Assad, firmed up that "group think," and ridiculed anyone who doubted this conventional wisdom.

With Kerry running near the front of the stampede, Obama tagged along repeating what all the important people thought they knew that Assad was guilty but Obama steered away from the war cliff at the last minute. He referred the issue to Congress and then accepted a compromise devised by Putin to have Assad surrender all his chemical weapons, even as Assad continued denying a role in the Aug. 21 attack.

After that Syrian deal was struck, the neocons and R2Pers pummeled Obama for weakness in deciding not to launch major military strikes against Syrian targets. Obama managed to avert another Mideast war but he faced accusations of vacillation.

The Ukraine crisis is following a similar pattern. The neocons and R2Pers immediately took the side of the western Ukrainian protesters in the Maidan as they challenged elected President Yanukovich who hails from eastern Ukraine.

Assistant Secretary Nuland openly supported the rebellion, reminding Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their "European aspirations," literally passing out cookies to the protesters and secretly plotting who should replace Yanukovich. Her choice, "Yats" or Arseniy Yatsenyuk, not surprisingly ended up as prime minister after the Feb. 22 coup, and he quickly pushed through the parliament a harsh austerity plan demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

R2Pers also rallied to the cause of the Maidan protesters, citing a principled responsibility to protect civilians resisting government repression. However, the R2Pers have taken a remarkably different stance toward the Ukrainians in the east who have risen up against the unelected post-coup regime in Kiev. Those

protesters are simply dismissed as pawns of the Russians, deserving whatever they get.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, a prominent R2Per, even wants the U.S. government to arm the Kiev regime so it can put down the pro-Russian protesters violently. On Thursday, Kristof wrote from Kiev: "For decades, Ukrainians have been starved, oppressed and bullied by Russians, and with Russia now inciting instability that could lead to an invasion and dismemberment of eastern Ukraine, plenty of brave Ukrainians here say they've had it and are ready to go bear-hunting."

So, while virtually no one in the mainstream U.S. media will acknowledge the well-documented role played by American neocons and other operatives in inciting instability in Kiev, leading to the violent overthrow of the elected president, almost everyone in the MSM accepts as indisputable fact that the eastern Ukrainian protests against the post-coup regime in Kiev are simply Russian provocations deserving of a violent response.

Economic Pressures

But an oddly discordant note was sounded in the Washington Post of all places. On Thursday, correspondent Anthony Faiola reported from Donetsk that many of the eastern Ukrainians whom he interviewed said the unrest was driven by fear over "economic hardship" and the IMF austerity plan that will make their lives even harder.

"At a most dangerous and delicate time, just as it battles Moscow for hearts and minds across the east, the pro-Western government is set to initiate a shock therapy of economic measures to meet the demands of an emergency bailout from the International Monetary Fund," Faiola reported.

In other words, even as Kerry, the neocons and the R2Pers blame only the Russians for the unrest in the east, a rare case of actual reporting from the scene finds a more realistic explanation, that many people in eastern Ukraine feel disenfranchised by the violent overthrow of their candidate Yanukovich and are frightened at the prospects of soaring heating bills and other cuts in their already austere lifestyles.

As for President Obama – as a timid "realist" – he has played his typical double game. He responded to the pro-Kiev bias of Official Washington by piling on with angry denunciations of Putin, but recognizing the painful consequences that would come from a full-blown confrontation with Russia Obama authorized negotiations to reduce tensions, an agreement that was announced on Thursday in Geneva.

Yet, even if the Ukrainian crisis is gradually walked back from the edge, I'm told that lasting damage has been done to the working relationship that had developed, behind the scenes, between Obama and Putin, collaboration that helped avert a U.S. war on Syria and hammered out a compromise to constrain Iran's nuclear program.

Putin had hoped that Russian cooperation on those two dangerous issues would open the door to other collaboration with Obama. But the Ukraine crisis brought those prospects to a halt. The Russians are particularly sensitive to the harsh rhetoric emanating from Kerry but also from Obama.

One adviser to the Russian government told me that the people around Putin feel that they are being treated shabbily even as Obama has benefited from their help.

The adviser summed up the Russian attitude: "How can you expect me to work with you during the day when you sleep with my wife at night? How can you whisper in my ear that we are friends and then go out in public and say terrible things about me? It doesn't work that way."

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

The Corruption of Mainstream Media

America's mainstream media still pretends it is the custodian of "serious journalism," but that claim continues to erode as the corporate press shies away from its duty to challenge propaganda emanating from various parts of the U.S. government, as Danny Schechter describes.

By Danny Schechter

First the good news: The Pulitzer Prize for Public Service was not only the best covered of its awards this year, but it recognized a series of disclosures that made many media outlets nervous, if not adversarial the publication of National Security Agency secrets leaked by Edward Snowden.

The award recognized the reporting by the Guardian in England and also Bart Gellman's work in the Washington Post even as they, did not recognize the work directly of Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras whose independent reporting appeared in many newspapers.

Poitras and Greenwald still make the news world nervous because a) they are outspoken, b) not always under the control and discipline of traditional editors, and 3) have an openly respectful and positive relationship with their source as if that is a high crime or misdemeanor.

It is significant that they were recognized by the Polk awards, but not the Pulitzer board. In some higher circles, their source, Edward Snowden, is still considered a traitor or worse.

The Pulitzer Prize is the big *enchilada* in the media world announced in a formal ceremony at the Pulitzer room in the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism on New York's Morningside Heights. The journalists who win these prizes are recognized for life as "Pulitzer Prize Winners," a sign that they reached the highest heights in the profession. It's a ticket to raises and more recognition.

I once was once told by a former dean of the same "J School" where I taught as an adjunct that they considered themselves the "Taj Mahal" of American Journalism. I didn't have the heart to remind her that the original Taj was built as a tomb.

Almost as significant as the prizes to stories emanating from a whistleblower was the award to an investigative report into coal miners who were denied black-lung disease benefits, a report produced by one of the not-for-profit media organizations, the Center for Public Integrity. A CPI reporter, Chris Hamby, won that one.

The ink on his award was not even dry before ABC News, a network I used to work for, muscled in with a high-profile media claim that since they aired a story based on Hamby's reporting, they deserved the Pulitzer too. The embarrassingly loud demand for credit by outgoing ABC President Ben Sherwood was gently, and then indignantly rebuffed by the Center's director Bill Buzenberg.

According to Talking Points Memo, Buzenberg said: "I don't take well to being bullied by anybody or threatened by anybody. We just stuck to the facts." Buzenberg explained that the Pulitzer committee did not award the prize for broadcast pieces and told ABC to cease its demands.

"The Center is prepared to show in great detail how little ABC's Brian Ross and Matt Mosk understood about even the most fundamental concepts and key facts and

how they repeatedly turned to Chris to advise them or, in some instances, to do their work for them," Buzenberg wrote in the letter to ABC, which added:

"Though you have framed the issue as the Center seeking to diminish ABC's contributions, the reality is quite the opposite: ABC is seeking to take credit for a large body of work that it did not produce. These are the facts, as confirmed under the very strict Pulitzer Prize rules by the Pulitzer Administrator Sig Gissler again just yesterday."

Having worked at ABC for eight years and written about the experience in my book. *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*, I could identify with Buzenberg's taking umbrage at network arrogance and bullying.

In my experience, TV executives see their shops as if they are military units under the control of the men who control the control rooms. (After reports leave the control room, they pass through the even more Orwellian sounding "Master Control.") These news chiefs would not do well on school report cards evaluating their ability to "work well with others."

The TV networks are desperate these days for legitimating recognition in a media world that has fragmented, and in which they no longer have the commanding position. That is not say that they don't also relish insider recognition and pats on the head from people in power.

At the same time that the newspaper world had recognized its obligation to recognize the Snowden story sans Snowden, of course, who the Moscow Times reports has run out of money in his forced exile but may finally have a new job a major network disses Snowden.

CBS News, once known as the network of Edward R Murrow and Walter Cronkite, has veered in another direction since it canned Dan Rather after a star chamber proceeding to punish him for a story showing that President George W. Bush lied about his military credentials.

Today, predictably, CBS has gone the other way on the Snowden story too. That shouldn't be a surprise for an outlet that appointed Pentagon groupie Lara Logan as its chief foreign correspondent, only to be called on the network's attempt to cover up her erroneous Benghazi report that gave credence to right-wing spin on the subject.

More recently, CBS produced a two part pro-NSA story on "60 Minutes," reported by John Miller who acknowledged on air that he has worked for the Director of National Intelligence and who then, after the story ran, left the network to become an intelligence chief at the New York Police Department.

As the Village Voice reported: “Miller is not the first reporter to make this sort of switch newsrooms are shrinking and folks have families to feed. . He has shown that there is a viable, and lucrative, career in circling the revolving door between journalism and law enforcement (or any other institution).”

Now, CBS, the “big eye” network, has gone even further, as Danny Weil reports: “CBS News has hired former acting director of the CIA, Mike Morell, as their senior security correspondent. Morell has been a frequent guest on CBS’ Face the Nation, where he has disseminated CIA propaganda and misleading information, raising questions about CBS’ journalistic integrity. Morell also works for Beacon Global Strategies, a DC consulting firm which peddles its government connections to defense contractors, raising even more questions about his role at CBS.”

This news came a few days after it was reported that CBS overlord, Les Moonves, is now bringing home \$63 million a year.

On Dec. 23, 2013, Morell appeared on Face the Nation, where he promoted the government’s campaign to prosecute Edward Snowden. On that day, Morell stated:

“He violated the trust put in him by the United States government. He has committed a crime, in my view. You know a whistleblower doesn’t run. A whistleblower does not disclose information that has nothing to do with what he says his cause is which is the privacy and civil liberties of Americans.

“You know if I could talk to Mister Snowden myself, what I would say is, ‘Edward, you say you’re a patriot, you say you want to protect the privacy and civil liberties of Americans, you say that you wanted Americans to have a debate about this and to make up their mind about what to do about this. Well, if you really believe that, if you really believe that Americans should be the judge of this program, then you should also believe that the Americans should be the judge of your behavior in this regard. So if you are the patriot that you say you are, you should come home and be judged.’”

Now, it’s our turn to judge: Is this or is this not media complicity in the surveillance state? Bear in mind that had Snowden not done what he had and if Greenwald and Poitras hadn’t done what they did we would not have learned of what’s being done by the NSA in our name. If we had waited on the big media to tell the story, we would all still be waiting.

News Dissector Danny Schechter edits Mediachannel.org and blogs at News Dissector.net. His latest book is *Madiba A to Z: the Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*. (Madibabook.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.

Fight Against MSM's 'Group Think'

From Editor Robert Parry: Whenever Official Washington rushes to embrace some misguided "group think," Consortiumnews.com has been there to ask the tough questions and challenge the "conventional wisdom." We have been doing this for 18-plus years, but we need your help to continue.

As we have seen just within the past year on Syria and Ukraine when nearly everyone in the mainstream media is clambering onboard the next bandwagon to war or a costly confrontation, we have been among the few putting on the brakes, demanding facts, not propaganda, and buying some time for cooler heads to prevail. And we do this within a very tight budget, paid for by our quarterly fundraisers.

That's why it's so important for us to reach these modest targets. For the spring, our goal is only \$25,000, but we still have more than 80 percent of the way to go. So, if you can, please help with a donation to our tax-exempt non-profit.

You can use a [credit card online](#) (we accept Visa, Mastercard or Discover) or you can [mail a check](#) to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. For readers wanting to use PayPal, you can address contributions to our account, which is named after our e-mail address: "consortnew@aol.com". (Since we are a 501-c-3 non-profit, your donations may be tax-deductible.)

As a special thank-you gift for anyone who [donates](#) \$100 or more or has set up a [recurring donation](#) with that annual total we are offering a DVD of the 1991 Frontline documentary, "Election Held Hostage," which examines whether Ronald Reagan's campaign exploited the 1980 Iran hostage crisis to win the presidency, **plus** a signed copy of my latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, which provides the latest documentary evidence on that Republican skullduggery.

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Again, thanks for your support and for making our 18-plus years of honest journalism possible.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.
