

The Neocons – Masters of Chaos

Exclusive: America's neoconservatives, by stirring up trouble in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, are creating risks for the world's economy that are surfacing now in the turbulent stock markets, threatening another global recession, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If you're nervously watching the stock market gyrations and worrying about your declining portfolio or pension fund, part of the blame should go to America's neocons who continue to be masters of chaos, endangering the world's economy by instigating geopolitical confrontations in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Of course, there are other factors pushing Europe's economy to the brink of a triple-dip recession and threatening to stop America's fragile recovery, too. But the neocons' "regime change" strategies, which have unleashed violence and confrontations across Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran and most recently Ukraine, have added to the economic uncertainty.

This neocon destabilization of the world economy began with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 under President George W. Bush who squandered some \$1 trillion on the bloody folly. But the neocons' strategies have continued through their still-pervasive influence in Official Washington during President Barack Obama's administration.

The neocons and their "liberal interventionist" junior partners have kept the "regime change" pot boiling with the Western-orchestrated overthrow and killing of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the proxy civil war in Syria to oust Bashar al-Assad, the costly economic embargoes against Iran, and the U.S.-backed coup that ousted Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich last February.

All these targeted governments were first ostracized by the neocons and the major U.S. news organizations, such as the Washington Post and the New York Times, which have become what amounts to neocon mouthpieces. Whenever the neocons decide that it's time for another "regime change," the mainstream U.S. media enlists in the propaganda wars.

The consequence of this cascading disorder has been damaging and cumulative. The costs of the Iraq War strapped the U.S. Treasury and left less government maneuvering room when Wall Street crashed in 2008. If Bush still had the surplus that he inherited from President Bill Clinton rather than a yawning deficit there might have been enough public money to stimulate a much-faster recovery.

President Obama also wouldn't have been left to cope with the living hell that the U.S. occupation brought to the people of Iraq, violent chaos that gave birth to what was then called "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and has since rebranded itself "the Islamic State."

But Obama didn't do himself (or the world) any favors when he put much of his foreign policy in the hands of Democratic neocon-lites, such as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Bush holdovers, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. David Petraeus. At State, Clinton promoted the likes of neocon Victoria Nuland, the wife of arch-neocon Robert Kagan, and Obama brought in "liberal interventionists" like Samantha Power, now the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

In recent years, the neocons and "liberal interventionists" have become almost indistinguishable, so much so that Robert Kagan has opted to discard the discredited neocon label and call himself a "liberal interventionist." [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Obama's True Foreign Policy 'Weakness.'"](#)]

Manipulating Obama

Obama, in his nearly six years as president, also has shied away from imposing his more "realistic" views about world affairs on the neocon/liberal-interventionist ideologues inside the U.S. pundit class and his own administration. He has been outmaneuvered by clever insiders (as happened in 2009 on the Afghan "surge") or overwhelmed by some Official Washington "group think" (as was the case in Libya, Syria, Iran and Ukraine).

Once all the "smart people" reach some collective decision that a foreign leader "must go," Obama usually joins the chorus and has shown only rare moments of toughness in standing up to misguided conventional wisdoms.

The one notable case was his decision in summer 2013 to resist pressure to destroy Syria's military after a Sarin gas attack outside Damascus sparked a dubious rush to judgment blaming Assad's regime. Since then, more evidence has pointed to a provocation by anti-Assad extremists who may have thought that the incident would draw in the U.S. military on their side. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Was Turkey Behind Syrian Sarin Attack?"](#)]

It's now clear that if Obama had ordered a major bombing campaign against Assad's military in early September 2013, he might have opened the gates of Damascus to a hellish victory by al-Qaeda-affiliated extremists or the even more brutal Islamic State, since these terrorist groups have emerged as the only effective fighters against Assad.

But the neocons and the "liberal interventionists" seemed oblivious to that

danger. They had their hearts set on Syrian “regime change,” so were furious when their dreams were dashed by Obama’s supposed “weakness,” i.e. his failure to do what they wanted. They also blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin who brokered a compromise with Assad in which he agreed to surrender all of Syria’s chemical weapons while still denying a role in the Sarin attack.

By late September 2013, the disappointed neocons were acting out their anger by taking aim at Putin. They recognized that a particular vulnerability for the Russian president was Ukraine and the possibility that it could be pulled out of Russia’s sphere of influence and into the West’s orbit.

So, Carl Gershman, the neocon president of the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, took to the op-ed page of the neocon-flagship Washington Post to sound the trumpet about Ukraine, which he called “the biggest prize.”

But Gershman added that Ukraine was really only an interim step to an even bigger prize, the removal of the strong-willed and independent-minded Putin, who, Gershman added, “may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad [i.e. Ukraine] but within Russia itself.” In other words, the new neocon hope was for “regime change” in Kiev and Moscow. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Neocons’ Ukraine/Syria/Iran Gambit.”]

Destabilizing the World

Beyond the recklessness of plotting to destabilize nuclear-armed Russia, the neocon strategy threatened to shake Europe’s fragile economic recovery from a painful recession, six years of jobless stress that had strained the cohesion of the European Union and the euro zone.

Across the Continent, populist parties from the Right and Left have been challenging establishment politicians over their inability to reverse the widespread unemployment and the growing poverty. Important to Europe’s economy was its relationship with Russia, a major market for agriculture and manufactured goods and a key source of natural gas to keep Europe’s industries humming and its houses warm.

The last thing Europe needed was more chaos, but that’s what the neocons do best and they were determined to punish Putin for disrupting their plans for Syrian “regime change,” an item long near the top of their agenda along with their desire to “bomb, bomb, bomb Iran,” which Israel has cited as an “existential threat.”

Putin also had sidetracked that possible war with Iran by helping to forge an interim agreement constraining but not eliminating Iran’s nuclear program. So, he became the latest target of neocon demonization, a process in which the New

York Times and the Washington Post eagerly took the lead.

To get at Putin, however, the first step was Ukraine where Gershman's NED was funding scores of programs for political activists and media operatives. These efforts fed into mass protests against Ukrainian President Yanukovich for balking at an EU association agreement that included a harsh austerity plan designed by the International Monetary Fund. Yanukovich opted instead for a more generous \$15 billion loan deal from Putin.

As the political violence in Kiev escalated with the uprising's muscle supplied by neo-Nazi militias from western Ukraine neocons within the Obama administration discussed how to "midwife" a coup against Yanukovich. Central to this planning was Victoria Nuland, who had been promoted to assistant secretary of state for European affairs and was urging on the protesters, even passing out cookies to protesters at Kiev's Maidan square.

According to an intercepted phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland didn't think EU officials were being aggressive enough. "Fuck the EU," she said as she brainstormed how "to help glue this thing." She literally handpicked who should be in the post-coup government "Yats is the guy," a reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk who would indeed become prime minister.

When the coup went down on Feb. 22 spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias who seized government buildings and forced Yanukovich and his officials to flee for their lives the U.S. State Department quickly deemed the new regime "legitimate" and the mainstream U.S. media dutifully stepped up the demonization of Yanukovich and Putin.

Although Putin's position had been in support of Ukraine's status quo i.e., retaining the elected president and the country's constitutional process the crisis was pitched to the American people as a case of "Russian aggression" with dire comparisons made between Putin and Hitler, especially after ethnic Russians in the east and south resisted the coup regime in Kiev and Crimea seceded to rejoin Russia.

Starting a Trade War

Pressured by the Obama administration, the EU agreed to sanction Russia for its "aggression," touching off a tit-for-tat trade war with Moscow which reduced Europe's sale of farming and manufacturing goods to Russia and threatened to disrupt Russia's natural gas supplies to Europe.

While the most serious consequences were to Ukraine's economy which went into freefall because of the civil war, some of Europe's most endangered economies in the south also were hit hard by the lost trade with Russia. Europe began to

stagger toward the third dip in a triple-dip recession with European markets experiencing major stock sell-offs.

The dominoes soon toppled across the Atlantic as major U.S. stock indices dropped, creating anguish among many Americans just when it seemed the hangover from Bush's 2008 market crash was finally wearing off.

Obviously, there are other reasons for the recent stock market declines, including fears about the Islamic State's victories in Syria and Iraq, continued chaos in Libya, and exclusion of Iran from the global economic system all partly the result of neocon ideology. There have been unrelated troubles, too, such as the Ebola epidemic in western Africa and various weather disasters.

But the world's economy usually can withstand some natural and manmade challenges. The real problem comes when a combination of catastrophes pushes the international financial system to a tipping point. Then, even a single event can dump the world into economic chaos, like what happened when Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008.

It's not clear whether the world is at such a tipping point today, but the stock market volatility suggests that we may be on the verge of another worldwide recession. Meanwhile, the neocon masters of chaos seem determined to keep putting their ideological obsessions ahead of the risks to Americans and people everywhere.

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](#).
