

# Delusional US 'Group Think' on Syria, Ukraine

**Exclusive:** Official Washington's "group think" on Syria and Ukraine is so delusional that it is putting the whole world in danger, but as with the Iraq War the mainstream U.S. news media is part of the problem, not part of any solution, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Neocon ideology appears to have seized near total control over the editorial pages of America's premier news organizations, including the New York Times and the Washington Post, contributing to an information crisis inside "the world's superpower," a development that should unnerve both Americans and the world community.

A Washington Post editorial, for instance, took President Barack Obama to task on Wednesday for one of the few moments when he was making sense, when he answered "no" to whether he was "actively discussing ways to remove" Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Obama added, "we are looking for a political solution eventually within Syria. But we're not even close to being at that stage yet."

The question itself – from Kristen Welker of NBC News – would have been remarkable enough if you weren't steeped in the arrogance of Official Washington where it's common to engage in casual speculation about overthrowing another country's government. In Neocon Land, it goes without saying that once the United States judges some world leader guilty for having violated international law or human rights or whatever, it is fine for the U.S. government to "take out" that leader, even if the supposed "facts" are a jumble of reality and propaganda that no one has bothered to seriously sort out.

In Assad's case, there is the conventional wisdom that his government carried out the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus, although much evidence now points to a provocation by anti-Assad rebels. There is also the fact that Assad's military has been battling the ruthless Islamic State and Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front, two terroristic organizations.

While that doesn't excuse excessive civilian casualties, it is a mitigating circumstance, much as the U.S. military rationalized the massive loss of civilian life after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as regrettable collateral damage but justified in prosecuting the post-9/11 "war on terror."

But, of course, there are two sets of rules, one for the world's "indispensable nation" and its allies and another for everyone else. There is an unstated

acceptance of these double standards by every “serious” person in Official Washington, including mainstream journalists.

In this view, the “exceptional” United States has the right to invade any country of its choosing and violently remove leaders not to its liking. If the shoe were on another foot say, some country seeking to remove a U.S. ally for violating international law or human rights or someone trying to hold former President George W. Bush accountable for his war crimes an entirely different fashion rack of principles would suddenly be in vogue.

Nevertheless, Obama answered Welker’s question appropriately. “No,” he said, the U.S. government is not now trying to overthrow Assad, whose government is the principal bulwark against an outright military victory by Al-Qaeda’s affiliate, Nusra Front, or the even more barbaric Islamic State.

Indeed, it would be madness for Obama to say or do differently, since he himself acknowledged last summer to New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman that the idea of a “moderate” rebel force in Syria was always a “fantasy.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Behind Obama’s Chaotic Foreign Policy.”](#)]

### **Dreamy Neocon Thinking**

The likely result of the U.S. military destroying Assad’s defenses would be a victory by Islamic extremists with their black flags flying over Damascus. That, in turn, would probably force the United States and its European allies to undertake a major invasion of Syria with hundreds of thousands of troops at the cost of hundreds of billions of dollars and no reasonable prospect for success.

Despite the craziness of this we-must-take-out-Assad thinking, it has become the “group think” of Official Washington. If only Assad were forcibly removed, this thinking goes, then the supposed “moderate opposition” would take over, transform Syria into a model democracy and everything would work out just fine. That this scenario is reminiscent of the dreamy neocon predictions about Iraq before the U.S. invasion in 2003 and would be even less likely in Syria seems to bother no one.

So, the Washington Post’s editors write in reaction to Obama’s negative reply on ousting Assad: “That message will be greeted with cheers by the Assad clique and its supporters in Iran; it will encourage the regime to believe it can continue its ‘barrel bomb’ and chlorine gas attacks with impunity. It will also probably ensure that the rift between the United States and its allies against the Islamic State continues to widen.”

Then, the Post’s editors glibly suggest that Obama should introduce U.S. ground forces, presumably into Syria as well as Iraq: “Mr. Obama appears to recognize

the severity of the threat posed by the Islamic State and appears to be focused on the job of leading the fight against it. But if he continues to allow his ideological resistance to steps such as the deployment of ground forces to constrain the campaign, he will ensure its failure.”

The Post’s casual attitude toward dispatching the U.S. military into foreign countries, even without the approval of a sovereign government and thus in defiance of international law, is typical of the neocon arrogance that launched the Iraq War, which, in turn, gave rise to both Al-Qaeda’s presence in the region and the Islamic State, which fought the U.S. occupation of Iraq under the name “Al-Qaeda in Iraq.”

In other words, it was the neocon disregard for international law that touched off this bloody mess in the first place, but the neocons are now popping up to give more advice on how Obama must handle the situation now. But their recommendations amount to war and more war. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Neocon Plan for War and More War.”](#)]

### **The Neocon NYT**

The neocons also have their claws into the New York Times, both the editorial section and the foreign desk. The Times’ coverage of Ukraine, for example, could be a textbook study of biased journalism, presenting the Ukraine crisis as all the fault of Russian President Vladimir Putin who supposedly instigated the trouble in some bid to reestablish the Russian Empire.

In reality, Putin was distracted by the Sochi Winter Olympics in February when the political crisis in Ukraine erupted into major violence. Belatedly, Putin sought to sustain the status quo in Ukraine, i.e., the government of the constitutionally elected President Viktor Yanukovich, but Putin’s efforts failed.

It was the United States and, to an extent, the European Union that were pressing for “regime change” in Ukraine. This strategy went back months if not years, with neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland reminding Ukrainian business leaders in December 2013 that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their “European aspirations.”

Then, in early February, Nuland was caught on the phone to U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt discussing who should be in the government after Yanukovich was removed. “Yats is the guy,” Nuland said in reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who indeed became prime minister after Yanukovich was ousted in a putsch on Feb. 22. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Powerful ‘Group Think’ on Ukraine.”](#)]

Yet, it is now Official Washington’s consensus that Putin instigated the Ukraine

crisis out of a desire to reclaim territory lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union and that he further plans to seize the Baltic states like some reincarnation of Adolf Hitler.

The “group think” is so absurd that even former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger saw through it. Kissinger said in an interview with the German newsmagazine Der Spiegel that the West was exaggerating the significance of the Crimean annexation given the peninsula’s long historic ties to Russia.

“The annexation of Crimea was not a move toward global conquest,” the 91-year-old Kissinger said. “It was not Hitler moving into Czechoslovakia. Putin spent tens of billions of dollars on the Winter Olympics in Sochi. The theme of the Olympics was that Russia is a progressive state tied to the West through its culture and, therefore, it presumably wants to be part of it. So it doesn’t make any sense that a week after the close of the Olympics, Putin would take Crimea and start a war over Ukraine.”

Instead, Kissinger argued that the West with its strategy of pulling Ukraine into the orbit of the European Union was responsible for the crisis by failing to understand Russian sensitivity over Ukraine and making the grave mistake of quickly pushing the confrontation beyond dialogue. But Kissinger also faulted Putin for his reaction to the crisis. “This does not mean the Russian response was appropriate,” Kissinger said.

But the neocon editors of the New York Times continue to pin everything on Putin, declaring in a Thursday editorial: “The United States and the European Union have made clear, and correctly so, that they hold President Vladimir Putin of Russia largely responsible for this state of affairs [in Ukraine].

“There is no question that by annexing Crimea and arming separatists in eastern Ukraine, Mr. Putin has done great damage to East-West relations, and to his country, which finds itself isolated and in economic trouble. The decision on Monday by the European Union to add more separatist leaders to the list of Mr. Putin’s allies barred from Europe may be largely symbolic, but along with the cold reception [toward Putin at the G-20 meeting] in Brisbane, it does let the Russian leader know that the West is not about to let him off the hook.”

But it is really the whole world that is on the hook of neocon ideology with the major U.S. news media now incapable of wriggling off and presenting anything approaching an objective analysis of what is happening in either the Middle East or Eastern Europe.

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