

Are Neocons an Existential Threat?

Exclusive: Despite a record of unprecedented error, American neocons remain the dominant foreign policy force in Official Washington, demanding more “regime change” in the Middle East and a new Cold War that could heat up and end all life on the planet, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The neoconservatives arguably have damaged American national interests more than any group in modern history. They have done more harm than the marginal Communists pursued by Sen. Joe McCarthy in the 1950s, more than the Yippies of the 1960s, more than Richard Nixon’s Watergate burglars in the 1970s or the Iran-Contra conspirators in the 1980s.

The neocons have plunged the U.S. government into extraordinarily ill-considered wars wasting trillions of dollars, killing hundreds of thousands if not millions of people, and destabilizing large swaths of the planet including the Middle East, much of Africa and now Europe. Those costs include a swelling hatred against America and a deformed U.S. foreign policy elite that is no longer capable of formulating coherent strategies.

Yet, the neocons have remained immune from the consequences of their catastrophes. They still dominate Washington’s major think tanks as well as the op-ed pages of virtually all the leading newspapers, including The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and New York Times. They hold down key positions in the State Department, and their “liberal interventionist” pals have the ear of President Barack Obama.

Clearly, the neocons are skilled operatives, knowing how to arrange a steady stream of funding for themselves, from military contractors donating to think tanks, from U.S. taxpayers footing the bill for organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy, and from ideological billionaires set on aligning U.S. foreign policy with hard-line Israeli desires.

The neocons are adept at writing op-ed articles that twist any set of facts into support for their ideological cause; they supply just the right quote that fits into the news cycle’s latest narrative; and they host policy conferences that attract powerful politicians and fawning media coverage.

But are the neocons a force that can coexist with the American Republic? Have they become an existential threat not only to the constitutional structure crafted in 1787 but to continued life on the planet? Are they locked on a course of action that could lead to a nuclear holocaust?

Clearly, the neocons' commitment to Israeli interests violates a key principle established by the nation's early presidents who all warned against "foreign entangling alliances" as a fundamental threat to a citizens' republic that would transform America into a warrior state that would inevitably sap the nation's liberties.

That loss of liberty has surely happened. Not only is there now bipartisan support for a surveillance state that can spy on the personal lives of American citizens, but the U.S. government has wedded itself to the concept of "strategic communications," a catch-phrase that merges psychological operations, propaganda and P.R. into a seamless approach toward managing public perceptions at home and abroad.

When information is systematically pushed through a filter designed to ensure consent, the core democratic concept of an informed electorate has been turned on its head: The people no longer oversee the government; the government manipulates the people.

Neocon Tactics

All this has been part of the neocon approach dating back to the 1980s when key operatives, such as Robert Kagan and Elliott Abrams, were part of inter-agency task forces designed to whip the American people into line behind the government's aggressive war policies. Guided by seasoned CIA propagandists, such as Walter Raymond Jr., the neocons learned their lessons well.

But the neocons are no longer just threatening the existence of the Republic; they are now endangering the continuation of life itself. They have decided to launch a new Cold War against Russia that will push the world toward the brink of thermo-nuclear war.

Of course, the neocons will frame their doomsday strategy as all Vladimir Putin's fault. They will insist that they are just standing up to "Russian aggression" and that anyone who doesn't join them is a "stooge of Moscow" or "weak." They will dictate the shape of the debate just as they have in countless other situations, such as guiding Americans to war in Iraq over non-existent WMD stockpiles.

The neocon pundits will write seemingly authoritative op-eds about devious Kremlin strategies which will glue black hats on the Russians and white hats on whomever is on the other side, whether the neo-Nazis in Ukraine or the Islamic State/Al Qaeda terrorists in Syria. Americans will be whipped up into a frenzy that will demand a direct clash with the "Russ-kies" or "regime change" in Moscow.

There will be little or no concern about the risks. With the neocons, there never is. The assumption is that if “Amur-ika” is tough, the other side will back down. Then, with U.S.-led economic sanctions from the outside and U.S.-funded NGOs stirring up trouble from the inside, “regime change” becomes the cure-all.

Everyone who’s important in Official Washington everyone on the talk shows and op-ed pages knows that these disruptive situations always play out just the way they’re diagramed inside the top think tanks. A hand-picked “democratic reformer” who’s traveled the think-tank circuit and gotten the seal of approval the likes of Iraq’s Ahmed Chalabi will easily be installed and then the target country will do whatever the neocons dictate. After all, that approach worked so well in Iraq. The neocons always know best.

Raising the Stakes

Yet, with Russia, the stakes are even higher than with Iraq. Yes, it’s easy to find fault with Vladimir Putin. I myself have a personal rule that men over 40 should keep their shirts on when out in public (unless maybe they’re actors in a Bond film or going for a swim at the beach).

But Putin at least is a rational player in global affairs. Indeed, he has tried to cooperate with President Obama on a variety of key issues, including convincing Syria to surrender its chemical weapons and getting Iran to make concessions in the nuclear deal two contributions to world peace that infuriated the neocons who favored bomb-bomb-bombing both Syria and Iran.

At a dinner party in Europe this summer, I was asked by a well-informed British woman what should be done with Putin. My answer was that Putin doesn’t frighten me; it’s the guy who comes after Putin who frightens me because despite the neocons’ confidence that their “regime change” plans for Moscow will install a malleable moderate, the more likely result would be a much harder-line Russian nationalist than Putin.

The idea of the nuclear codes being handed to someone determined to defend the honor of Mother Russia is what scares me. Then, the clumsily aggressive neocons in Washington would have their reckless counterpart in Moscow, with neither side having the wisdom of a John F. Kennedy or a Nikita Khrushchev as displayed during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

Would American neocons or a Russian super-nationalist have the wisdom and courage to back down, to compromise, to make the concessions necessary to avoid plunging over the edge? Or would they assume that the other guy would blink first and that they would “win” the showdown?

I recall what William R. Polk, one of Kennedy's mid-level aides during the Cuban Missile Crisis, wrote recently about what happens to the human mind under such stress.

"Since human beings make the decisions, we must be aware of decision makers' vulnerabilities," Polk wrote. "During the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was one of about 25 civilians fully engaged in the events. I was not at the center but in the second or third 'echelon.' So I did not feel the full strain, but by the Thursday of the Crisis, I was thoroughly exhausted. My judgment must have been impaired even though I was not aware of it.

"I do remember, however, a terrible episode fortunately lasting only a few minutes at which I thought to myself, 'let's just get it over with.' When later I met with my Soviet counterparts, I got the impression, although they denied it, that my feelings were not unique. How the strain impacted on the inner group I can only guess."

If someone as stable and serious as Bill Polk had such thoughts "let's just get it over with" what might happen when American neocons or hyped-up Russian nationalists are inserted into the decision process? That is an existential question that I don't want to even contemplate.

Endless Putin-Bashing

And, if you doubt that the neocons will engage in over-the-top Cold War-style Putin bashing, you should read the op-ed by The Washington Post's neocon deputy editorial page editor Jackson Diehl on Monday, entitled "Putin shifts fronts: With a move into Syria, he continues his in-your-face maneuvers."

Diehl delves into Putin's psyche a process that is so much easier than doing real reporting and concludes that Putin's decision to join the fight in Syria against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda is just another attempt to stick his finger in the eye of the righteous but clueless United States.

Diehl, of course, starts off with the neocon-approved narrative of the Ukraine crisis, ignoring the key role of neocon Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland (Robert Kagan's wife) in midwifing the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that overthrew democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich and installed an intensely anti-Russian regime on Russia's border. Nuland even handpicked the new Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, telling U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt in a phone call several weeks before the coup that "Yats is the guy."

The coup-makers then dispatched neo-Nazi militias (and Islamist militants) to wage a bloody "anti-terrorism operation" against ethnic Russian Ukrainians who resisted the "regime change." [See Consortiumnews.com's "Ukraine Merges Nazis

and Islamists.”]

But all that complexity is neatly boiled down by American neocons and the mainstream U.S. media as “Russian aggression.” Regarding the Syrian civil war, some neocons have even joined with senior Israeli officials in claiming that a victory by Al Qaeda is preferable to the continuation of Assad’s secular regime. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Syria’s Nightmarish Narrative.”]

Yet, however the story goes, the biggest bad guy is Putin, always with sinister motives and evil intent. So, in explaining the situation in Ukraine and Syria, Diehl writes:

“Throughout the summer, Russia’s forces in eastern Ukraine kept up a daily drumbeat of attacks on the Ukrainian army, inflicting significant casualties while avoiding a response by Western governments. On Sept. 1, following a new cease-fire, the guns suddenly fell silent. Optimists speculated that Vladimir Putin was backing down.

“Then came the reports from Syria: Russian warplanes were overflying the rebel-held province of Idlib. Barracks were under construction at a new base. Ships were unloading new armored vehicles. Putin, it turns out, wasn’t retreating, but shifting fronts, and executing another of the in-your-face maneuvers that have repeatedly caught the Obama administration flat-footed.”

The rest of the op-ed is similarly didactic and one-sided: Putin is the villain and Obama is the rube. In Diehl’s world, only he and other neocons have what it takes to take on Putin and put Russia down.

Any alternative explanation for Russia’s action in Syria is brushed aside, such as Putin deciding that a victory by either Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front as favored by Israel or the even more bloodthirsty Islamic State is unacceptable and thus Assad’s regime must be stabilized to avert a major geopolitical catastrophe.

Typically, the neocons breeze past the frightening logic of what the collapse of Assad’s military would mean for the Middle East, Europe and the world. After all, once Israeli leaders decided to throw in their lot with Al Qaeda in Syria, the die was cast as far as the neocons were concerned.

But the notion that the neocons can micromanage the outcome in Syria, with “moderate” Al Qaeda taking Damascus rather than the more “radical” Islamic State, reflects the arrogant know-nothing-ism of these U.S. opinion leaders. More likely, Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front would coordinate with their former allies in the Islamic State and share in the Sunni revenge against Syria’s Christian, Alawite, Shiite and other minorities.

So, while the Islamic State would busy itself chopping off heads of “heretics,” Al Qaeda could use its new headquarters in Damascus to plot the next round of terror attacks against the West. And, as destabilizing as the current refugee flow into Europe has been, it would multiply astronomically as the survivors of the Islamic State/Al Qaeda bloodletting flee Syria.

With Europe in chaos and the neocons still insisting that the real enemy is Russia, the possible consequences would be frightening to contemplate. Yet, this is the course that the neocons have set for the world and nearly all the Republican candidates for president have signed on for the journey along with Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton.

In 2014, arch-neocon Robert Kagan, whom Secretary of State Clinton selected as one of her advisers while also promoting his wife, Victoria Nuland, told The New York Times that he could embrace a Clinton presidency: “If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it’s something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.” [For more, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Is Hillary Clinton a Neocon-Lite?”](#) and [“Obama’s True Foreign Policy ‘Weakness.’”](#)]

So far, virtually no one in the 2016 presidential race or in the mainstream U.S. news media is seriously addressing the reality of the neocons’ “regime change” chaos spreading across the Middle East and the prospect of a destabilized Europe. What limited discussion there is on the campaign trail mostly echoes Jackson Diehl’s Putin-bashing.

No one dares confront the existential question of whether the United States and the world can continue to tolerate and accommodate the neoconservatives.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). 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](#).
