

Escalating the Risky Fight with Russia

Exclusive: To box in President-elect Trump, the neocons and liberal hawks are pushing for “crippling sanctions” against Russia that they see as crucial to their dangerous “regime change” agenda in Moscow, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The neocons and their liberal-interventionist chums never seem to think through one of their “regime change” schemes. It’s enough that they wrote the plan down in some op-ed article or reached a consensus at a think-tank conference. After that, all there is to do is to generate the requisite propaganda, often accompanied by intelligence “leaks” and maybe some heartbreaking photos of children, to rile up the American people so they can be easily herded into the next slaughterhouse.

We’ve seen this pattern play out over and over again, from Iraq to Libya to Syria to Ukraine. You could even go back to the 1980s and the project for arming Afghanistan’s mujahedeen and a collection of international jihadists led by Osama bin Laden, a project enthusiastically supported by both Republicans and Democrats.

The one consistent in these bloody follies is that the neocon/liberal-hawk plans never work out as they were drawn up. Time and again, it turns out that the great idea – looking so good on the op-ed page or sounding so smart at the think-tank conference – wasn’t all that great or smart after all.

Remember how the Iraqis were going to welcome U.S. troops with flowers and how neocon favorite Ahmed Chalabi would be hailed as Iraq’s new leader; or how the murder of Muammar Gaddafi would be followed by the flowering of Libyan democracy; or how enforcing the “must go” edict on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would be accomplished pretty quickly; or how overthrowing democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich was sure to put a stop to Ukraine’s endemic corruption.

Instead, the people in those countries were left bloodied and battered while the areas around them became destabilized, too, now with those social and economic disruptions extending all the way to Europe, which not that long ago was one of the world’s bastions of stability. And, oh, yes, the Afghan operation from the 1980s gave us the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

No Accountability

The neocon/liberal-hawk elitists never seem to get anything right but they are

so well-connected that they never are held accountable. They just keep coming up with new gambits, expressed with the same confidence and certainty – all beautifully explained in the next round of op-eds and at the think-tank conferences.

When the new scheme arrives, it's as if the earlier disasters hadn't happened. Across the ideological spectrum, the mainstream media's star reporters act as if the only proper reaction toward the latest brilliant idea is to show undying credulity. The only questions that get asked of politicians are why they aren't intervening faster and going bigger, whether the new plan is to blast the targeted country in a "shock and awe" display or ship weapons to some proxy force which may include jihadists and neo-Nazis or sabotage a country's economy so the people will support a coup out of hunger and desperation.

Time and again, the unhappy country at the receiving end of America's latest "regime change" project ends up wallowing in pools of blood as the international circle of chaos widens. But the U.S. public's attention quickly goes elsewhere, like a child bored with a broken Christmas toy. The targeted country is mostly forgotten, except for the occasional op-ed or think-tank complaint that if only the politicians had started the wars earlier or had dispatched a bigger military force or had kept U.S. soldiers there indefinitely or had done more to undermine some demonized leader, then the neocon/liberal-hawks scheme would have worked out just perfectly. Which sets us up for the next grand idea.

Dropping the Big One

But the next grand idea arguably could be the last one. After several years of intensifying anti-Russian propagand, the United States reportedly is ready to escalate the New Cold War with Russia by inflicting new punishments in retaliation for the still-unproven allegation that President Vladimir Putin authorized the hacking of Democratic emails and then released them to the American people via WikiLeaks.

Though the Obama administration has yet to provide any public evidence to support the charges, mainstream news outlets – particularly The Washington Post and The New York Times – have lapped up their own leaks from the Central Intelligence Agency, which appears to have been operating under instructions from President Obama to discredit President-elect Donald Trump's victory.

The hope seemed to be that the CIA's claims about Putin's interference in the election could anger enough electors to the Electoral College to prevent Trump from getting the 270 required votes on Dec. 19 and thus toss the selection of a new president into the House of Representatives, which under the Twelfth Amendment would pick from the Electoral College's top three vote-getters (who

turned out to be Trump, Hillary Clinton and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who received four votes from Clinton's electors in Washington State).

Though this Electoral College coup failed – Trump got more than the 270 votes he needed – the CIA's claims about Russian hacking lived on with neocon and liberal-hawk members of Congress (not to mention pretty much every important op-ed writer and editorialist in America) demanding that Russia be made to pay a heavy price.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, spoke for many of his colleagues when he tweeted, "My goal is to put on President Trump's desk crippling sanctions against Russia."

In a new leak to The Washington Post on Wednesday, Obama administration officials vowed to do just that, readying "a series of measures to punish Russia for its interference in the 2016 presidential election, including economic sanctions and diplomatic censure [as well as] covert actions that will probably involve cyber-operations."

A New Escalation

This latest U.S. escalation of tensions with nuclear-armed Russia actually culminates at least a half decade of probing by the United States for Moscow's vulnerabilities to "regime change," an operation that appears to have begun around Russia's 2011 elections and continued with protests against Putin's election in 2012, street demonstrations dubbed by the West's media as the "snow revolution," since all these strategies seem to require a "color" or a similar special identification marking.

Former Secretary of State (and defeated Democratic presidential nominee) Hillary Clinton has cited Putin's belief that she orchestrated this interference in Russian politics as his supposed motive for leaking emails that embarrassed her campaign. And, without doubt, the Russian election protests had the strong support of various U.S.-based "non-governmental organizations" that receive funding either from the U.S. government or from U.S. "pro-democracy" foundations.

There is also no doubt that the West's neocons and liberal hawks want desperately to instigate a "regime change" in Moscow, in part, as punishment for Putin interfering in their "regime change" schemes for Syria and Iran.

In 2013, by getting Syria to surrender its chemical weapons, Putin helped thwart plans for a U.S. bombing campaign against the Syrian military in retaliation for a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus that the Obama administration and Western media immediately blamed on President Assad though later evidence

suggested that it was a provocation carried out by Islamic extremists connected to Al Qaeda.

Putin also assisted Obama in securing concessions from Iran regarding the agreement to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon, which disrupted Israeli and neocon hopes for a plan to “bomb-bomb-bomb” Iran, as Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, once described.

Putin’s Payback

The neocons and liberal hawks delivered Putin his first dose of payback when they helped orchestrate a putsch in neighboring Ukraine in 2014 that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich. Neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, a Hillary Clinton favorite, was caught on an unsecure phone line discussing with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt how they would “glue” or “midwife” a change in government that would put Nuland’s choice, Arseniy “Yats is the guy” Yatsenyuk in power. Meanwhile, the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) sponsored scores of projects inside Ukraine for training activists and funding journalists.

Another key project seeking to undermine Yanukovich’s government was the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Open Society foundation of billionaire currency speculator George Soros.

Amid a massive propaganda barrage, street protests in Kiev and open encouragement from senior U.S. officials, a violent coup on Feb. 22, 2014 – spearheaded by neo-Nazi street fighters – forced Yanukovich to flee for his life and brought Yatsenyuk to power as Ukraine’s prime minister.

When ethnic Russians from Crimea and eastern Ukraine rejected this unconstitutional transfer of power – and Crimeans voted overwhelmingly to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia – the State Department and the mainstream Western media reported this resistance as a “Russian invasion” or “Russian aggression” – prompting the first wave of U.S. economic sanctions to punish Russia.

The European Union was brought into the sanctions regime after Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, and the U.S. government immediately blamed Russia. The crash investigation – though technically “Dutch-led” – was effectively put under the control of Ukraine’s unsavory intelligence agency, the SBU, which has among its mandates the protection of Ukrainian government secrets and has been implicated in torturing captured ethnic Russians.

Though I was told that at least some CIA analysts saw the hand of Ukrainian

extremists behind the MH-17 shoot-down – and Dutch intelligence reported that the only powerful anti-aircraft missiles in the area that day were under the control of the Ukrainian military – Obama refused to release the details of the U.S. intelligence assessment, allowing the SBU-dominated investigation to pin the blame on Russia. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

The U.S.-government-subsidized OCCRP also was involved in the analysis of the so-called “Panama Papers,” a law firm’s purloined financial records that led to front-page stories seeking to tie Putin to off-shored wealth even though Putin’s name was not found in the documents.

The West’s thorough demonization of Putin set the stage for Hillary Clinton’s attempts to delegitimize Donald Trump by portraying him as Putin’s “puppet” because the Republican nominee advocated seeking normalized relations with Russia and cooperating with Moscow on counter-terrorism operations against Islamic State.

The Clinton campaign theme, which I was personally briefed on, sought to convince journalists that Trump was a Russian agent completely under Putin’s control. That theme provided the backdrop for the CIA’s leaked allegations about Russian hacking of the emails of the Democratic National Committee, which revealed how the DNC improperly tilted the primary playing field in favor of Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders. A second batch of emails from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street interests and pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton money machine.

Obama’s Hand

Given Obama’s refusal to let CIA analysts brief reporters about internal CIA dissent questioning the mainstream consensus blaming the sarin attack on Syria and the MH-17 shoot-down on Russia – because those briefings might undercut the prevailing propaganda narratives – it’s a fair assumption that Obama authorized the CIA leaks to The Washington Post and other major media outlets about the alleged Russian hacks.

I’ve also been told that there is some internal CIA dissent against the publicly released claim of Russian responsibility for the Democratic leaks, an analytical dispute that appears to center less on whether Russian intelligence and other entities may have hacked the email accounts than whether Russia then released the material to WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and former British Ambassador Craig Murray, an Assange associate who says he communicated with one of the sources (or a representative) in a meeting in Washington in September, say [the emails did not](#)

come from the Russian government. Murray also has indicated that the two batches of emails had two different sources, both American, one a disgruntled Democrat and the other possibly from the U.S. intelligence community.

Despite these doubts, the CIA's leaked claims about alleged Russian responsibility for the hacks have prompted congressional demands for a thorough investigation, possibly even a special committee like the ones that examined the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals.

Telling the Full Story

If such an inquiry is undertaken – and assuming it's not a pre-packaged deal that starts with the conclusion of Russian guilt and assembles whatever is necessary to “prove” the case – the investigation should also obtain testimony regarding Putin's suspicion that Secretary of State Clinton, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Soros organization had a hand in the aborted “snow revolution” in Moscow from 2011 to 2013.

The investigation also should explore whether Obama assigned the CIA's leadership to leak information to the mainstream media in a failed attempt to reverse the outcome of the U.S. election by trying to stampede the Electoral College into denying Trump the presidency. Under the CIA's charter, it is forbidden to operate domestically or interfere in U.S. politics, a concern that worried President Harry Truman at the CIA's founding.

One of the most serious abuses of the Reagan administration was its systematic politicizing of the CIA's analytical division when it was under the control of CIA Director William Casey and his deputy, Robert Gates.

According to the CIA's then-chief Russia expert Melvin Goodman and other former CIA analysts, the Casey-Gates team broke down the agency's historic tradition of objective analysis and bullied CIA analysts into producing phony intelligence that served President Reagan's ideological agenda.

That corruption continued through both Republican and Democratic presidents, including George W. Bush's “slam-dunk” National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's non-existent WMD and now including Obama's selective release of data on Syria, Ukraine and Russia.

Going to Extremes

As destructive as the past distortion of intelligence has been, the Obama CIA's apparent interference in an attempt to reverse the outcome of a U.S. presidential election arguably ranks with the worst intelligence scandals in U.S. history.

And, compounding the CIA's political intervention is the fact that this controversy has taken on a life of its own as the Obama administration prepares to hit nuclear-armed Russia with a combination of new economic sanctions and covert cyber-attacks, apparently with the goal of heading off any rapprochement between Putin and Trump.

The neocons and their liberal-hawk allies clearly have in mind plans for making the Russian economy scream and somehow engineering a "regime change" in Moscow despite Putin's current 80 percent approval ratings. But this latest scheme – like the earlier ones – is almost surely not going to end as its architects have drawn it up.

While the neocons and liberal hawks may dream about some Western-beloved "liberal" being carried into the Kremlin while Putin is dragged away, the likelihood that the Russian people would put up with another round of American-prescribed "shock therapy" – in which Russia's resources were plundered, Russian life expectancy plunged, and various U.S. "advisers" and hedge funds made out like bandits – is remote.

The far more likely result of Sen. Graham's "crippling sanctions" would be that a hardline Russian nationalist would rise, lacking Putin's calculating temperament. Instead of Putin and his famous sang froid, the world would likely be facing some hot-blooded extremist determined to defend the honor of Mother Russia even to the point of pulling out the nuclear codes and pushing the button.

The neocons and liberal hawks may believe they've got this New Cold War all figured out, but if their record holds, they could easily be driving the world toward a hot war that would indeed be the war to end all wars – and to end humanity as well.

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).

Christmas and Endless War

There is a profound contradiction for Christians who celebrate the "prince of peace" at Christmas and then return to the business of endless – and expanding – war the rest of the year, as the Rev. Howard Bess observes.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

Christmastime is a good time for a frank discussion about Christianity and war. The great issue of Christmas is not whether or not Jesus was born of a virgin but whether his followers will embrace his message of peace on this earth.

My thinking goes to the tradition of the cross. Crucifixion on a cross was a cruel execution practiced daily by the rulers from Rome. For his executioners, Jesus was simply one more rabble-rouser who was disturbing the peace. Jesus practiced non-resistance to the very end. He looked at his murderers; then he looked to the heavens and spoke the words of reconciliation: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

Christian churches (which have often endorsed wars between nations and even wars of conquest) have somehow missed the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians: "God...has given us the ministry of reconciliation." There is no reconciliation in killing or in punishment. War and punishment of any kind are an admission of failure.

In April 2016, a large gathering of devout Roman Catholics gathered at the Vatican to discuss "Nonviolence and Just Peace." It was not a gathering of only select Bishops and Catholic hierarchy. Ordinary priests and nuns were there as were devout social scientists, theologians, diplomats and other lay persons who see themselves as peacekeepers.

While the search for world peace goes beyond the issue of war, all participants agreed that what is being done is not working. Included in the non-functional approaches is the centuries old teaching of "Just War." ("Just War" theory within Christianity dates back to Saint Augustine who defended the necessity of war amid the collapsing Roman Empire. The doctrine was refined by Thomas Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century who laid out principles that justified war as long as it was waged by a properly instituted authority, pursued a good and just purpose, and had the ultimate goal of establishing peace.)

Sister Nazik Matty, an Iraqi nun who was driven from her home in Mosul by ISIS, has become a key spokesperson for the movement for Just Peace, telling the conference: "Which of the wars we have been in is a just war? ... In my country there was no just war. War is the mother of ignorance, isolation, and poverty. Please tell the world there is no such thing as a just war. I say this as a daughter of war."

On behalf of Sister Nazik Matty and all others who have been victims of war, I repeat: There is no just war. There is no reconciliation in punishment of any kind. There is no suggestion in the teachings of Jesus that there is any justice

to be found in killing or punishment. This is true whether it is a slap in the face of a child by a parent, a bullet in the heart by a murderer, or the touch of a button in a drone control center.

Though I am a proud graduate of Wheaton College, a centerpiece of Evangelical theology and leadership, I have long been out of step with Wheaton's style of Christian orthodoxy. I am a Baptist and have a deep commitment to a diversity that is not allowed in the Wheaton faculty.

Wheaton College taught me to think and nurtured my devotion to Christ, but there is a blight on the Wheaton campus. The ROTC unit at Wheaton trains very bright, capable persons for service in the United States military. The motto of Wheaton College is "For Christ and His Kingdom." Confronting my beloved alma mater is not easy. The Wheaton College motto is compromised as long as the ROTC unit remains on campus.

Alternative Path

I have always found it difficult to be a critic unless I also point to a better way. "War is not the answer" is a meaningless statement without an alternative path proposal. I offer these proposals as a witness to the non-religious and as a challenge to believers of every kind. I write as a devoted follower of Jesus, the peasant teacher from Nazareth and true son of God.

RID OURSELVES OF JUST WAR TEACHINGS IN OUR CHURCHES, COLLEGES AND SEMINARIES. The thinking of Augustine and Aquinas has been advocated for centuries and has no record of success, only failures. There has never been a just war.

EMBRACE THE MINISTRY AND VOCATION OF RECONCILIATION. EXPLORE ITS MEANING AND PURSUE ITS PRACTICE. The kingdom of God is not a gated community or a ghetto. It is not about fences or guard posts. It is about love, kindness and justice.

PRACTICE REPENTANCE AND ABOUNDING GRACE. Blame, accusation, and finger pointing are cancers. Remember and proclaim Jesus's words from the cross.

REPAIR WHAT IS BROKEN AND CREATE, BUILD, AND SHARE WHAT IS NEEDED. We are a throwaway society. War has turned human beings into throwaway things, too. Heal people and create for their benefit.

DEVELOP PERSONAL LIFESTYLES COMPATIBLE WITH THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS FROM NAZARETH. I return to Matthew, chapters 5-7, for my own benefit and spiritual health. I urge you all to do the same. I pray a blessed new year, full of peace for you all and for all our neighbors in the world.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in

Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.
