

The Neocons' Back-Door to Trump

Exclusive: By enforcing a “group think” calling Iran the chief sponsor of terrorism, Official Washington’s neocons are maneuvering the Trump administration into conforming with Israeli (and Saudi) desires, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

President Trump’s foreign policy is sliding toward neoconservative orthodoxy on the Middle East because White House insiders are aligning with Israeli-Saudi interests and vowing undying hostility toward Iran, which they falsely insist is the chief sponsor of terrorism.

I’m told that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, privately at least, recognizes that Saudi Arabia and its Sunni-led Gulf state allies are the prime backers of Al Qaeda and Islamic State – with Iran actually fighting these major terror groups – but close advisers to President Trump, including son-in-law Jared Kushner and National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, appear wedded to Official Washington’s “group think” blaming Iran for pretty much everything that’s gone wrong in the region.

This “group think” requires that everyone who wants to be taken seriously in Official Washington must repeat the mantra that “Iran is the principal sponsor of terrorism.” The reason is that Washington’s establishment is locked into saying just about whatever the extremely rich Saudis and the extremely influential Israelis tell it to say. Trump himself has labeled Iran “#1 in terror.”

Ironically, Flynn – when he was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency – oversaw an insightful 2012 [analysis](#) that accurately traced the rise of the vicious Sunni jihadist movement in Syria to support from the Gulf states and to the Obama administration’s policies. The report explicitly warned of the possibility of “an Islamic State,” which indeed emerged in 2014 with high-profile decapitations of U.S. hostages.

In a 2015 [interview](#), Flynn expanded on the analysis, saying that the Obama administration and its allies made a “willful decision” to back what the report called the creation of “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in Eastern Syria” with the goal of pressuring or overthrowing the Syrian government. Flynn said the intelligence on this extraordinary point “was very clear.”

Yet, now Flynn – like almost everyone else in Official Washington – focuses his

rage at Iran for the mess in the Middle East.

This blame-Iran “group think” has remarkable similarities to the one that rationalized the disastrous war in Iraq, i.e., that Saddam Hussein was in cahoots with Al Qaeda and was likely to give the terrorists his hidden WMDs. That fake analysis ignored the fact that the secular Hussein was a sworn enemy of Al Qaeda’s fundamentalists and they hated him, too.

So, although the Saddam-allied-with-Al-Qaeda lie was obvious to anyone who knew anything about Middle East politics, it was repeated endlessly by supposedly in-the-know Washington insiders to justify President George W. Bush’s bloody invasion of Iraq, which killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis along with nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers and spread chaos across the strategic region.

The Iran-Terror Deception

Now, we see a similar self-deception about which country is the principal sponsor for terrorism and other troubles. The truth is that Iran as a Shiite-governed nation is on the opposite side of the region’s sectarian divide from Al Qaeda and Islamic State, the two major Sunni terror groups that have taken aim at the United States and Europe.

Indeed, Iran has committed troops to neighboring Iraq and Syria to help fight Al Qaeda and Islamic State. Yet, the misguided consensus citing Iran as the principal sponsor of terrorism continues, leading the Trump administration off into a new round of misjudgments.

For instance, Trump received an embarrassing slap-down from the U.S. judiciary because he excluded Saudi Arabia and other countries that actually have produced terrorists who have struck the United States, including the 9/11 hijackers, from his seven-Muslim-nation travel ban.

Some Trump officials may realize the ugly reality about these left-off-the-list “allies” and their support for Al Qaeda and Islamic State but still lie anyway for political convenience. Others may have repeated the lie so often that they have come to believe it.

In the case of Kushner, The New York Times reported on Friday that he has bought into a strategy for negotiating an Israel-Palestine peace agreement that relies on the good offices of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Sunni Arab states.

It then follows that since Saudi Arabia and Israel are enthusiastic backers of the Iran-is-the-principal-sponsor-of-terrorism line, Kushner may see it as a prerequisite for securing their cooperation.

However, whether President Trump and his team keep telling this lie or not, the chances for the novice Kushner negotiating a genuine Israel-Palestine peace deal are slim to none. A powerful and arrogant Israel is not likely to make any meaningful concessions to the weak and divided Palestinians.

What might be possible is for Saudi Arabia, other Sunni-led states and Israel to gang up on the vulnerable Palestinians and subjugate them onto some undesirable land inside "Greater Israel," what might be called the "give-them-three-rocks-and-a-potty-john plan."

But such an unjust resolution of the longstanding Palestinian issue is not likely to be a long-term solution. Israel's continued treatment of the Palestinians as an oppressed indigenous population will remain before the world's conscience, much as South African apartheid did.

Son-in-Law's Failure

So, Ivanka Trump's husband will face near-certain failure in his "peace" initiative, but – before that becomes fully apparent – he could lead the young administration off in some harmful directions, bringing it back into line with Official Washington neoconservative orthodoxy on the Mideast.

That was apparent in The New York Times' front-page article outlining Kushner's plan. According to Times' correspondents Peter Baker and Mark Landler, the plan "mirrors the thinking of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who will visit the United States next week, and would build on his de facto alignment with Sunni Muslim countries in trying to counter the rise of Shiite-led Iran."

It's interesting that the Times is finally acknowledging the reality of an Israeli-Saudi alliance, something that we have been [describing at Consortiumnews.com](http://Consortiumnews.com) since 2013.

The Times rationalizes this "de facto alignment" as necessary to counter "Iranian hegemony in the region," another wild exaggeration. "Hegemony" refers to dominance or control and Iran exercises no such power over the Mideast where its influence is limited to alliances with the embattled governments in Syria and Iraq and with Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon and to a very small degree the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

How that measures up to Iran's "hegemony" – especially coming from U.S. mainstream journalists who would scream if the word were applied to the United States – is something only a neocon could understand. The Times article also relies on neocon think tanks and neocon thinkers for encouraging words about Kushner's plan.

“There are some quite interesting ideas circulating on the potential for U.S.-Israeli-Arab discussions on regional security in which Israeli-Palestinian issues would play a significant role,” said Robert Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “I don’t know if this is going to ripen by next week, but this stuff is out there.”

Kushner’s approach is called the “outside-in” strategy aiming to reach agreement with the surrounding Sunni Arab states and then using that leverage to force the Palestinians to go along.

“The logic of outside-in is that because the Palestinians are so weak and divided – and because there’s a new, tacit relationship between the Sunni Arabs and Israel – there’s the hope the Arabs would be prepared to do more,” said Dennis B. Ross, a neocon operative who has served as a Middle East negotiator for several presidents. Ross is a well-known anti-Iran hawk who co-founded United Against Nuclear Iran.

Ready for Netanyahu

The Times also reported that Trump and Kushner had a White House dinner with casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who has mused about the possibility of dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran. Adelson also is a major backer of Netanyahu.

Trump himself has known Netanyahu for many years. I’m told the relationship dates back to Netanyahu’s days as Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations in the mid-1980s.

So, it’s perhaps not surprising that Trump would send out NSC advisor Flynn to put Iran “on notice” for conducting some conventional ballistic missile tests and that Trump would include Iran on his travel ban.

Trump also has been consulting with Sunni leaders in the Middle East, including Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, Saudi Arabia’s King Salman, Abu Dhabi’s Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Times reported. None of those countries were included in Trump’s executive order restricting travel from the seven other mostly Muslim countries.

With his son-in-law out-front, Trump’s approach to the Middle East is shaping up as similar to previous administrations, catering to Israel and Saudi Arabia even to the extent of wholesale lying to the American people about who is the main backer of terrorism.

Trump also may be isolating his new Secretary of State as Tillerson apparently looks to more realist options and fights to limit neocon influences in making U.S. foreign policy. But Tillerson is facing a challenge in staffing the State

Department without turning to veterans of past administrations with close ties to the neocons.

The hard truth is that the neocons and their liberal-interventionist cohorts have been so successful in purging contrarian thinkers from the foreign policy establishment that there aren't many independent-minded people left with recent management experience at the State Department.

Now, with the neocons having found a backdoor into the Trump administration via son-in-law Kushner, the prospects for a sharp break with the long reign of disastrous neocon policies in the Middle East have grown dimmer.

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](#)).
