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## Neocon War Hawks Want Hillary Clinton Over Donald Trump. No Surprise – They’ve Always Backed Her

By Branko Marcetic  
March 25, 2016

The neoconservative Right would have you believe this election affords them a uniquely tough choice. On the one hand, there’s Hillary Clinton, liberal bogeywoman and hated embodiment of the Democratic establishment. On the other, there’s Donald Trump, who has repeatedly called the Iraq war a mistake, accused the Bush administration of lying to drag the United States into said war, claimed he would be “neutral” in his dealings with Israel and just recently sketched out an “unabashedly noninterventionist approach to world affairs” for the *Washington Post* editorial board.

Whether or not Trump believes any of this is, as usual, up for debate. But some neocons are so disgusted with his rejection of foreign policy establishment thinking that they’ve declared the unthinkable: They’re going to vote for Hillary Clinton.

Concerned that Trump would “destroy American foreign policy and the international system,” author Max Boot told *Vox* that Clinton would be “vastly preferable.” Historian Robert Kagan has also come out in favor of Clinton, saying he feels “comfortable with her on foreign policy.” Eliot Cohen, a former Bush administration official who has been called “the most influential neocon in academe,” declared Clinton “the lesser evil, by a large margin.”

It would be convenient to accept that this support is just part of a Faustian bargain neocons have reluctantly entered into because of the looming specter of Trump. But the truth is, neocons and assorted war hawks have long had a soft spot for Clinton and her views on foreign policy.

When President Obama nominated Clinton for Secretary of State in 2008, Richard Perle, one of the Iraq War's primary cheerleaders and chairman of the Defense Policy Board in the lead-up to the war, said he was "relieved." "There's not going to be as much change as we were led to believe."

Perle, who was sometimes referred to as the "Prince of Darkness" and who once predicted there would be "some grand square in Baghdad that is named after President Bush," made clear his support for Clinton was not due to a lack of choices. "I heard about others on the list [for Secretary of State] that I wouldn't be happy about," he said. "Those were mostly Republicans."

In the same interview, George Shultz, Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan and an early proponent of what would come to be known as the "Bush doctrine," stated that: "I think she could be a very good Secretary of State." Deeming her "well-informed" and "curious," Shultz's only concern about her selection was that, having competed against Obama in a sometimes vicious campaign for the Democratic nomination, their relationship might be weakened.

That same year, conservative writer Noemie Emery, writing for the neocon *Weekly Standard*, dubbed Clinton "The Great Right Hope." She wrote about the "relief" felt by conservatives that she was bringing her "steely-eyed stare" to the position of Secretary of State, saying:

*As for the conservatives, many of those who began 2008 willing to do anything to defeat her tended to end it feeling sorry she lost. They began to tell themselves and each other they would sleep better at night if she were the nominee of her party.*

Clinton, she wrote, had "begun the campaign as the former First Feminist" and "ended it as the Warrior Queen, more Margaret Thatcher than Gloria Steinem."

Three years later, Dick Cheney, the neocon's neocon, appeared to urge Clinton to launch a primary challenge against Obama. "I think it's not a bad idea," he told *ABC*. Asked if she would have been a better president, Cheney replied:

*Hillary Clinton is a pretty formidable individual and I think she's probably the most competent individual they've got in their – in their cabinet. And – frankly, I thought she was going to win the nomination last time around...maybe there will be enough ferment in the Democratic Party so that there will be a primary on their side.*

While no doubt an example of some high-level trolling by Cheney, who would have been thrilled to see a dysfunctional Democratic Party hobbling into the election, there's a reason he said this of Clinton and not, say, Joe Biden.

It's not just neocons specifically. War hawks of all stripes have been happy to shower praise on Clinton's foreign policy. In 2011, Lindsey Graham told the Council on Foreign Relations: "This

is an outstanding national security team put together by President Obama. I hope he will listen to them. Secretary Clinton is a great choice to be our Secretary of State.”

Any time Lindsey Graham, who eagerly supported the Iraq War and has repeatedly called for a war with Iran, endorses your national security team, it should stop and give you pause. Then again, given that Clinton threatened to “totally obliterate” Iran in 2008, perhaps it shouldn’t be surprising.

John McCain, another outspoken supporter of untold numbers of American wars, had this to say about Clinton on Chris Matthews’ *Hardball* in 2014:

*MCCAIN: Do I think that she is good on foreign policy issues? I think it’s a – this is a legitimate question. Look, it is well-known that Secretary – Hillary Clinton and I have a good relationship. We have...*

*MATTHEWS: Well, don’t you agree on a lot?*

*MCCAIN: But – yes, we do agree on a lot.*

During the 2008 campaign, Clinton did at one point appear to praise McCain’s “lifetime of experience” at the expense of Obama, so maybe he was just returning the favor.

Jim Inhofe, a Republican defense hawk who was once so eager to involve the United States in Ukraine that he held up old photos from 2008 as evidence of Russia’s presence in the country, was similarly effusive after voting for her confirmation to Secretary of State.

“I appreciate her recognition of the need to combat al Qaeda's efforts to seek safe havens in failed states in the Horn of Africa,” he said in a press release. “I strongly agree with her support of Israel’s right to defend itself. Finally, I appreciate her challenge to Iran to end its nuclear weapons program. ... I also trust and will ensure that where stronger efforts need to be made, U.S. foreign policy will include the strong arm of military where diplomacy fails.”

The list goes on. Despite recently going all-in on Trump and paying lip service to Clinton’s “disastrous foreign policies,” her one-time nemesis Newt Gingrich sang a very different tune in 2014. Citing an interview given by Clinton in which she criticized Obama’s refusal to arm the Syrian rebels in 2011, he said he was “impressed.”

“If you read it carefully, she makes some comments about the need for a strategic plan, the need to take on the jihadists across the whole region,” Gingrich said. He also added that she “was very clearly, decisively on the side of [Benjamin] Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, and on Israel’s right to defend itself – much firmer than either Secretary [John] Kerry or President Obama on the issue of Israel or Hamas.”

Condoleezza Rice, former national security adviser and later Secretary of State under Bush, congratulated Clinton on doing “a fine job” as Secretary of State, despite her misgivings about the Obama administration’s approach as a whole. “The problem isn’t Hillary Clinton, who’s

great,” she assured her audience. Rice won infamy for her claim that “we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud” by delaying war against Iraq for the sake of finding evidence of nuclear weapons. She also denied that the “war on terror” contributed to the growth of terrorism and later implicitly criticized Obama for advocating talks with Iran.

Clinton’s relationship with Nixon and Ford’s Secretary of State Henry Kissinger – no neoconservative himself, though one might say that some of his best friends are – has already been well-covered in this campaign, but deserves mention. Clinton has called Kissinger, who according to one conservative estimate may be responsible for anywhere in the range of 3-4 million deaths, a “friend,” and he in turn called her an “outstanding appointment” for Secretary of State and predicted she would be a “good president.”

This week, Clinton demonstrated exactly why such a wide assortment of neocons and right-wing war hawks have been so quick to compliment her over the years. In a widely panned speech at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee’s (AIPAC) annual meeting on Monday, Clinton pledged her undying loyalty to Israel, promised to go to war with Iran if necessary, and implied the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement was anti-Semitic. The speech was interpreted as an attempt to move to the right of Trump on Israel.

Perhaps nothing sums up Clinton’s foreign policy better than a recent photo of her warmly hugging George W. Bush at Nancy Reagan’s funeral – an almost too-perfect metaphor for Clinton’s embrace of neocon policies. And as the picture makes clear, the war hawks are just as happy to cuddle her back.