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Neocons Leverage Trump-Hate for More Wars

By Robert Parry

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A savvy Washington observer once told me that the political reality about the neoconservatives is that they alone couldn't win you a single precinct in the United States. But both Republicans and Democrats still line up to gain neocon support or at least neocon acceptance.

Part of the reason for this paradox is the degree of dominance that the neoconservatives have established in the national news media – as op-ed writers and TV commentators – and the neocon ties to the Israel Lobby that is famous for showering contributions on favored politicians and on the opponents of those not favored.

Since the neocons' emergence as big-time foreign policy players in the Reagan administration, they also have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, receiving a steady flow of money often through U.S. government-funded grants from organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy and through donations from military contractors to hawkish neocon think tanks.

But neocons' most astonishing success over the past year may have been how they have pulled liberals and even some progressives into the neocon strategies for war and more war, largely by exploiting the Left's disgust with President Trump.

People who would normally favor international cooperation toward peaceful resolution of conflicts have joined the neocons in ratcheting up global tensions and making progress toward peace far more difficult.

The provocative “Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act,” which imposes sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea while tying President Trump’s hands in removing those penalties, passed the Congress without a single Democrat voting no.

The only dissenting votes came from three Republican House members – Justin Amash of Michigan, Jimmy Duncan of Tennessee, and Thomas Massie of Kentucky – and from Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky and Independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont in the Senate.

In other words, every Democrat present for the vote adopted the neocon position of escalating tensions with Russia and Iran. The new sanctions appear to close off hopes for a détente with Russia and may torpedo the nuclear agreement with Iran, which would put the bomb-bomb-bomb option back on the table just where the neocons want it.

The Putin Obstacle

As for Russia, the neocons have viewed President Vladimir Putin as a major obstacle to their plans at least since 2013 when he helped President Obama come up with a compromise with Syria that averted a U.S. military strike over dubious claims that the Syrian military was responsible for a sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Subsequent evidence indicated that the sarin attack most likely was a provocation by Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate to trick the U.S. military into entering the war on Al Qaeda’s side.

While you might wonder why the U.S. government would even think about taking actions that would benefit Al Qaeda, which lured the U.S. into this Mideast quagmire in the first place by attacking on 9/11, the answer is that Israel and the neocons – along with Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-governed states – favored an Al Qaeda victory if that was what was needed to shatter the so-called “Shiite crescent,” anchored in Iran and reaching through Syria to Lebanon.

Many neocons are, in effect, America’s Israeli agents and – since Israel is now allied with Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Gulf states versus Iran – the neocons exercise their media/political influence to rationalize U.S. military strikes against Iran’s regional allies, i.e., Syria’s secular government of Bashar al-Assad.

For his part, Putin compounded his offense to the neocons by facilitating Obama’s negotiations with Iran that imposed strict constraints on Iran’s actions toward development of a nuclear bomb and took U.S. war against Iran off the table. The neocons, Israel and Saudi Arabia wanted the U.S. military to lead a bombing campaign against Iran with the hope of crippling their regional adversary and possibly even achieving “regime change” in Tehran.

Punishing Russia

It was in that time frame that NED's neocon President Carl Gershman identified Ukraine as the "biggest prize" and an important step toward the even bigger prize of removing Putin in Russia.

Other U.S. government neocons, including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain, delivered the Ukraine "prize" by supporting the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that overthrew the elected government of Ukraine and unleashed anti-Russian nationalists (including neo-Nazis) who began killing ethnic Russians in the south and east near Russia's border.

When Putin responded by allowing Crimeans to vote on secession from Ukraine and reunification with Russia, the West – and especially the neocon-dominated mainstream media – denounced the move as a "Russian invasion." Covertly, the Russians also helped ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine who defied the coup regime in Kiev and faced annihilation from Ukrainian military forces, including the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, which literally displayed Swastikas and SS symbols. Putin's assistance to these embattled ethnic Russian Ukrainians became "Russian aggression."

Many U.S. pundits and journalists – in the conservative, centrist and liberal media – were swept up by the various hysterias over Syria, Iran and Russia – much as they had been a decade earlier around the Iraq-WMD frenzy and the "responsibility to protect" (or R2P) argument for the violent "regime change" in Libya in 2011. In all these cases, the public debate was saturated with U.S. government and neocon propaganda, much of it false.

But it worked. For instance, the neocons and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks achieved extraordinary success in seducing many American "peace activists" to support the "regime change" war in Syria by sending sympathetic victims of the Syrian government on speaking tours.

Meanwhile, the major U.S. media essentially flacked for "moderate" Syrian rebels who just happened to be fighting alongside Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate and sharing their powerful U.S.-supplied weapons with the jihadists, all the better to kill Syrian soldiers trying to protect the secular government in Damascus.

Successful Propaganda

As part of this propaganda process, the jihadists' P.R. adjunct, known as the White Helmets, phoned in anti-government atrocity stories to eager and credulous Western journalists who didn't dare visit the Al Qaeda-controlled zones for fear of being beheaded.

Still, whenever the White Helmets or other "activists" accused the Syrian government of some unlikely chemical attack, the information was treated as gospel. When United Nations investigators, who were under enormous pressure to confirm the propaganda tales beloved in the West, uncovered evidence that one of the alleged chlorine attacks was staged by the jihadists, the mainstream U.S. media politely looked the other way and continued to treat the chemical-weapons stories as credible.

Historian and journalist Stephen Kinzer has said, “Coverage of the Syrian war will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the American press.”

But all these successes in the neocons’ “perception management” operations pale when compared to what the neocons have accomplished since Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton last November.

Fueled by the shock and disgust over the egotistical self-proclaimed pussy-grabber ascending to the highest office in the land, many Americans looked for both an excuse for explaining the outcome and a strategy for removing Trump as quickly as possible. The answer to both concerns became: blame Russia.

The evidence that Russia had “hacked our democracy” was very thin – some private outfit called Crowdstrike found Cyrillic lettering and a reference to the founder of the Soviet KGB in some of the metadata – but that “incriminating evidence” contradicted Crowdstrike’s own notion of a crack Russian hacking operation that was almost impossible to trace.

So, even though the FBI failed to secure the Democratic National Committee’s computers so the government could do its own forensic analysis, President Obama assigned his intelligence chiefs, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, to come up with an assessment that could be used to blame Trump’s victory on “Russian meddling.” Obama, of course, shared the revulsion over Trump’s victory, since the real-estate mogul/reality-TV star had famously launched his own political career by spreading the lie that Obama was born in Kenya.

‘Hand-Picked’ Analysts

According to Clapper’s later congressional testimony, the analysts for this job were “hand-picked” from the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency and assigned to produce an “assessment” before Obama left office. Their Jan. 6 report was remarkable in its lack of evidence and the analysts themselves admitted that it fell far short of establishing anything as fact. It amounted to a continuation of the “trust us” approach that had dominated the anti-Russia themes for years.

Much of the thin report focused on complaints about Russia’s RT network for covering the Occupy Wall Street protests and sponsoring a 2012 debate for third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Democratic-Republican debates between President Obama and former Gov. Mitt Romney.

The absurdity of citing such examples in which RT contributed to the public debate in America as proof of Russia attacking American democracy should have been apparent to everyone, but the Russia-gate stampede had begun and so instead of ridiculing the Jan. 6 report as an insult to reason, its shaky Russia-did-it conclusions were embraced as unassailable Truth, buttressed by the false claim that the assessment represented the consensus view of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies.

So, for instance, we get the internal contradictions of a Friday column by Washington Post columnist David Ignatius who starts off by making a legitimate point about Washington groupthink.

“When all right-thinking people in the nation’s capital seem to agree on something – as has been the case recently with legislation imposing new sanctions on Russia – that may be a warning that the debate has veered into an unthinking herd mentality,” Ignatius wrote as he questioned the wisdom of overusing sanctions and tying the President’s hands on when to remove sanctions.

Lost Logic

But Ignatius failed to follow his own logic when it came to the core groupthink about Russia “meddling” in the U.S. election. Despite the thinness of the evidence, the certainty about Russia’s guilt is now shared by “all right-thinking people” in Washington, who agree that this point is beyond dispute despite the denials from both WikiLeaks, which published the purloined Democratic emails, and the Russian government.

Ignatius seemed nervous that his mild deviation from the conventional wisdom about the sanctions bill might risk his standing with the Establishment, so he added:

“Don’t misunderstand me. In questioning congressional review of sanctions, I’m not excusing Trump’s behavior. His non-response to Russia’s well-documented meddling in the 2016 presidential election has been outrageous.”

However, as usual for the U.S. mainstream media, Ignatius doesn’t cite any of those documents. Presumably, he’s referring to the Jan. 6 assessment, which itself contained no real evidence to support its opinion that Russia hacked into Democratic emails and gave them to WikiLeaks for distribution.

Just because a lot of Important People keep repeating the same allegation doesn’t make the allegation true or “well-documented.” And skepticism should be raised even higher when there is a clear political motive for pushing a falsehood as truth, as we should have learned from President George W. Bush’s Iraq-WMD fallacies and from President Barack Obama’s wild exaggerations about the need to intervene in Libya to prevent a massacre of civilians.

But Washington neocons always start with a leg up because of their easy access to the editorial pages of The New York Times and Washington Post as well as their speed-dial relationships with producers at CNN and other cable outlets.

Yet, the neocons have achieved perhaps their greatest success by merging Cold War Russophobia with the Trump Derangement Syndrome to enlist liberals and even progressives into the neocon drive for more “regime change” wars.

There can be no doubt that the escalation of sanctions against Russia and Iran will have the effect of escalating geopolitical tensions with those two important countries and making war, even nuclear war, more likely.

In Iran, hardliners are already telling President Hassan Rouhani, “We told you so” that the U.S. government can’t be trusted in its promise to remove – not increase – sanctions in compliance with the nuclear agreement.

And, Putin, who is actually one of the more pro-Western leaders in Russia, faces attacks from his own hardliners who view him as naïve in thinking that Russia would ever be accepted by the West.

Even relative Kremlin moderates such as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, are citing Trump’s tail-between-his-legs signing of the sanctions bill as proof that the U.S. establishment has blocked any hope for a détente between Washington and Moscow.

In other words, the prospects for advancing the neocon agenda of more “regime change” wars and coups have grown – and the neocons can claim as their allies virtually the entire Democratic Party hierarchy which is so eager to appease its angry #Resistance base that even the heightened risk of nuclear war is being ignored.