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The War Party Makes a Comeback

By Justin Raimondo

May 8, 2014

The War Party is making a comeback. After laying low in the wake of the disastrous invasion and occupation in Iraq, and the complete failure of our efforts to subdue Afghanistan, the coalition of forces that made these strategic catastrophes possible has returned – and they are winning.

While the public is still highly skeptical of foreign adventurism – recent polls show overwhelming support for supposedly "isolationist" policies – the political class is doing what it does best: undermining the popular will by simply doing an end run around the American people. Their campaign has opened up on three major fronts:

1) **The Snowden revelations** – The single biggest blow to the War Party's hegemonic power in Washington was delivered by Edward Snowden, the libertarian dissident ex-NSA contractor forced into exile for exposing the horrifying scope of what is nothing less than the apparatus of a police state in the making. This set the authoritarians in both parties back on their heels: it was a blow in the dark – and this time they were on the receiving end.

However, it wasn't long before they picked themselves up off the ground and started fighting back. As the rising tide of protest on both sides of the political spectrum threatened to upend official Washington, they mobilized their forces and manned the battlements.

The siege of the castle was begun by the heroic Rep. Justin Amash (R-Michigan), our Braveheart, who, in tandem with Rep. John Conyers (D-Michigan), introduced the most radical "reform" of the National Security Agency yet proposed: his bill would've yanked funding for its unconstitutional activities outright. In an effort led by "progressive" Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, my former representative in Congress, Amash's assault was staved off – but just barely.

In a closely-watched debate, the bill splintered the partisan divide and polarized the House along ideological lines, albeit not in accordance with the familiar left-right straitjacket we are all supposed to be wearing. For a few glorious hours the old liberal-conservative paradigm was abolished and the new political reality stood revealed in all its starkness: arguing on the floor of the House, it was libertarians versus authoritarians in a knockdown drag-out fight that nearly succeeded in toppling the Surveillance State.

But that was just the beginning. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wisconsin), who introduced the original "Patriot" Act, breached the castle walls by furiously denouncing the NSA data dragnet as "un-American" and demanding to know "How could the phone records of so many innocent Americans be relevant to an authorized investigation as required by the Act?"

And so the battle lines were drawn around "reform" legislation that would somehow "fix" the problem without dismantling the legal basis for the necessary task of investigating and prosecuting criminal acts. The two camps coalesced around two rival bills, one introduced in the Senate by Diane Feinstein, and the Sensenbrenner bill – known, respectively, as the "FISA Improvement Act" and the "USA Freedom Act." The former was widely mocked – Sensenbrenner called it "a joke" – as an extension of the NSA's powers rather than anything remotely approaching "reform," however loosely defined, while the latter picked up co-sponsors and support on both sides of the aisle.

As the castle walls began to shudder and shake, the defenders retreated to their inner sanctum and contemplated a way to break the siege. What was needed was some kind of truce: a negotiated settlement that would let them keep the keys to their kingdom whilst giving the impression they had surrendered. So they ran up the white flag, and conferred with the other side: using the Byzantine rules of the House, which give committee chairmen the power to bottle up legislation or wave it through, they arranged for the Freedom Act to pass the Judiciary Committee – but only after being essentially gutted, as Marcy Wheeler explains [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). (Also [here](#) and [here](#).)

In brief, the "compromise" bill deploys the time-honored bureaucratic weapon of linguistic obfuscation to redefine language and use it in ways no ordinary person would recognize. In translating the intent of legislators into lingo describing the technical architecture of our emerging police state, terms like "selector" can be interpreted broadly enough to put not even a dent in the NSA's armor.

The final legislative product will be an amalgamation of the language contained in both the original Sensenbrenner bill and the Feinstein extension of the NSA's powers, leading to the creation of a new hybrid system in which the power of the State to track, surveil, and investigate

Americans on suspicion of "terrorism" will be extended in more ways than it is (theoretically) restricted.

The castle still stands, its inner sanctum unbreached – while, outside, the peasants with pitchforks gather ...

2) **The new cold war** – The Iraq and Afghan conflicts exhausted the American people, and by the time the new gang in the White House decided to go on yet another Middle East rampage – Libya, Bahrain, Syria – their patience was coming to an end. When the Obamaites got around to Syria, with Hillary Clinton and General Petraeus leading the charge, they'd finally had enough: a major public outcry scotched that one pretty decisively. Plans to go after Iran – the neocons' favored target – had been shelved earlier by the administration, and the War Party was frustrated. They had a very big problem: there was no one left to go to war with!

Osama bin Laden was dead, Al Qaeda in eclipse, and the never-very-convincing neocon attempt to portray China as the new bogeyman had petered out. American capitalism was conquering the Chinese market without a shot being fired anyway, so why bother?

In preparing a new war narrative, the groundwork had already been done: the neocons had been doing a job on Russia ever since their favorite oligarchs had been sent packing by Putin, and the Russian leaders' refusal to jump on board the Iraq war train was the final straw. It wasn't until later, however, when the complete lack of an official foreign bogeyman threatened to end the War Party's profitable racket, that ostensible liberals and their sterner "progressive"-minded comrades enlisted as foot-soldiers in the new cold war. A storyline portraying Putin's Russia as a homophobic racist anti-Semitic fascist Hell was thrown together, in tandem with a semi-covert effort by the US to overthrow the democratically elected Ukrainian government.

This was a cause both neocons and progressives could glom onto, and the Ukrainian coup was the perfect occasion for a grand alliance: Samantha Power and Bill Kristol, together at last!

3) **The political battle** – As the War Party has always understood, but some libertarians have never grasped, electoral politics is the main battlefield in the war for the hearts and minds of Americans. Insofar as mobilizing large numbers of people around a particular cause is concerned, it usually only happens around election time. Even more importantly, of course, he who controls the State controls the guns – and gets to point them in a certain direction.

The War Party has had remarkable success in reserving the job of bipartisan gatekeeper for itself: by presenting voters with a "choice" between two candidates with virtually identical views on foreign policy and civil liberties, they have managed to maintain control of the presidency, Congress, and the two major parties ever since the end of World War II.

The combined impact of war fatigue and the Snowden revelations had sent the War Party reeling, but the castle was still surrounded by the moat of electoral politics – and there are plenty of crocodiles in those waters.

As the 2016 presidential contest looms closer, the two camps – the authoritarian and libertarian tendencies in American politics – are gathering behind their respective champions. On one side is Hillary Clinton, whose disdain for the Internet predates the present NSA controversy, and who has already been all but nominated by acclamation by the Democrats a full year and a half before the first primary. Running interference for her are a number of prospective Republican candidates with zero chance of winning the White House, along with the not-for-sure candidacy of Jeb Bush. Bush's entry would make the race a competition of rival political dynasties – an easy hook for the lazy media and a good way to obscure the real issues before the public.

And then there's Senator Rand Paul (R-Kentucky), who has all but declared his candidacy – and is using his lawsuit against the NSA as a launching pad for his campaign.

The smear campaign against the son of Ron Paul has already started, with David Corn of *Mother Jones* competing with the Washington *Free Beacon* – the voice of Sheldon Adelson inside the Beltway – to see who can make the most vicious attacks. And they aren't forgetting about Justin Amash, believe you me: he is the target of a primary challenge by one Brian Ellis, who is supported by millions in out of state neocon money – including a hefty donation from Home Depot – in addition to plenty of dough from the Chamber of Commerce (on account of Amash's opposition to the corrupt crony capitalism which is the signature cause of that lobby).

Another target of the War Party, staunch anti-interventionist and Ron Paul ally Rep. Walter Jones (R-North Carolina), beat back his neocon primary opponent, a former lobbyist and Bush administration insider, but it was a close call. They had lots of money, but they never engaged Jones on the issues for which he is justly famous: his fierce opposition to the Iraq war, and his bold declaration that Dick Cheney is going to find a place in Hell right next to Lyndon Baines Johnson. Only the "Emergency Committee for Israel," which spent a lot of moolah on ads denouncing him for not wanting war with Iran, brought up foreign policy issues during the campaign – and these probably helped Jones more than they hurt him.

In short, the War Party has fought their opponents – that is, *us* – to a standstill on all three battlefronts: the legislative, the ideological, and the electoral. Not only that, but they're slowly but surely making a real comeback. Their crowning moment will be the election of Hillary Clinton – or some warmongering, anti-libertarian Republican – as President in 2016.

As Walter Cronkite used to say: and that's the way it is, folks, as of May 8, 2014, at 3:09 Pacific Standard Time. Stay tuned to this space for updates.