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How Obama Enables Atrocities

By Robert Parry

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Exclusive: President Obama seems so scared of offending the Saudis and their Israeli allies that he will tolerate almost any outrage, including Saudi Arabia’s mass beheadings and/or shootings of the regime’s enemies including a Shiite political leader who dared criticize the monarchy, writes Robert Parry.

As the New Year dawns, the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks remain firmly in control of Official Washington’s storylines – on Syria, Russia and elsewhere – even as their policies continue to wreak havoc across the Mideast and threaten the stability of Europe and indeed the future of civilization.

The latest proof of this dangerous reality came when Saudi Arabia’s repressive Sunni monarchy executed prominent Shiite political leader Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr for criticizing the nation’s kings and princes. Before the killing, the Obama administration held its tongue in public so as not to antagonize the Saudi royals. (Nimr’s nephew awaits Saudi “crucifixion” for his role as a teenager in Arab Spring protests.)



Saudi King Salman meets with President Barack Obama at Erga Palace during a state visit to Saudi Arabia on Jan. 27, 2015.

After the Nimr execution, the State Department issued a mild protest toward the Saudis while blurring the guilt by twinning it with criticism of Iran where outraged protesters damaged the Saudi embassy, which led to Saudi Arabia's retaliatory breaking of relations with Iran.

"We believe that diplomatic engagement and direct conversations remain essential in working through differences," State Department spokesman John Kirby said meekly on Sunday, while some senior U.S. officials reportedly seethed in private over the latest Saudi provocation.

"This is a dangerous game they are playing," one official told The Washington Post's Karen DeYoung while insisting on anonymity to discuss U.S.-Saudi relations.

But the fact that the Obama administration could not voice its revulsion over the Saudi mass head-chopping (along with some firing squads) for 47 men, including Nimr, over the weekend speaks volumes. President Barack Obama and other insiders continue to tip-toe around the unsavory U.S. "alliances" in the Mideast.

Over the past several years, Saudi Arabia sealed its impervious protection from U.S. government criticism by forming an undeclared alliance with Israel around their mutual hatred of Shiite-ruled Iran and its Shiite allies, a cause picked up by American neocons and shared by the career-oriented liberal interventionists.

Some more "realist-oriented" U.S. officials, reportedly including Obama and some national security aides, recognize the havoc that neocon/liberal-hawk strategies continue to wreak across the region and now spreading into Europe, but they act powerless to do anything bold to stop it.

With Israel's lobby siding with the Sunni states in their bloody rivalry with Shiite states, most U.S. politicians and pundits have scrambled to defend each recurring outrage by the Saudis, Qataris and Turks by trying to flip the script and somehow put the blame on Iran, Syria and Russia.

Getting a Pass

Thus, the Saudis, Qataris and Turks get mostly a pass for arming and enabling radical jihadists, including Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Israel also provides assistance to Al Qaeda's Nusra Front along the Golan Heights and bombs allies of the Syrian government and, of course, faces no official U.S. criticism.

In 2014, when Vice President Joe Biden blurted out the truth about Saudi support for Islamic terrorism inside Syria, he was the one who had to apologize. [Quote at 53:20 of clip.] In 2015, when Saudi Arabia invaded and bombed Yemen after hyping Iran's support for Houthi rebels, the Obama administration sided with the Saudis even as their wanton attacks on poverty-stricken Yemen killed thousands of civilians and created a humanitarian crisis.

For more than a year after President Obama announced his air war against the Islamic State in summer 2014, Turkey continued to let the terror group run an industrial-style oil smuggling operation from Syria and Iraq through Turkey. Only when Russia entered the conflict last fall was the U.S. government shamed into joining in bombing raids to destroy the truck convoys. Yet, Obama still defended Turkey and bought its promises about finally trying to seal a 100-kilometer gap in its border.

Then, when Turkey retaliated against the Russian anti-terrorist bombing raids inside Syria by willfully shooting down a Russian Su-24 plane whose pilot was murdered after bailing out, Obama again sided with the Turks even though their claim that the Russian plane had violated Turkish air space was dubious at best. By their account, the plane had intruded over a sliver of Turkish territory for 17 seconds.

In other words, whatever these U.S. "allies" do – no matter how brutal and reckless – the Obama administration at least publicly rushes to their defense. Otherwise, the neocon/liberal-hawk "group think" would be offended – and many angry editorials and columns would follow.

While this strange reality may make sense inside Official Washington – where careerism is intense and offending the Israel Lobby is a sure career killer – this pusillanimous approach to these grave problems is endangering U.S. national interests as well as the world's future.



Prince Bandar bin Sultan, then Saudi ambassador to the United States, meeting with President George W. Bush in Crawford, Texas, on Aug. 27, 2002.

Not only has the neocon/liberal-interventionist obsession with “regime change” turned the Middle East into a vast killing field but it has now spread instability into Europe, where the fabric of the European Union is being shredded by dissension over how to handle millions of Syrian refugees.

The United Kingdom may vote to leave the E.U., removing one of the original anchors of the European project which — for all its faults — has deservedly gotten credit for replacing a history of European blood-soaked conflicts with peaceful cooperation.

The spreading disorder has had political repercussions in the United States, too, where panic over terrorism is reshaping the presidential race.

Yet, instead of practical solutions such as pressuring all rational sides in the Syrian conflict to engage in peace talks and hold free elections that give the Syrian people the power to decide who their future leaders will be, Official Washington instead generates “talking points,” such as calling Syrian President Bashar al-Assad a “magnet for terrorism” who “must go” — although his forces have done the most to stop an outright victory by Al Qaeda and Islamic State.

If one buys this “magnet” theory, then you’d also have to seek “regime change” in every country that’s been attacked by terrorists, including the United States, France, United Kingdom, Spain, etc. In the case of Syria, what’s remarkable is that the sponsorship of terrorism by U.S. “allies” and indeed by the U.S. government itself has been so blatant. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Climbing into Bed with Al Qaeda.”]

However, as far as Official Washington is concerned, it doesn’t really matter what Assad has or hasn’t done. What’s important is that “regime change” in Syria has been on the neocons’ to-do list since at least the mid-1990s — along with the brilliant idea of “regime change” in Iraq. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “How Israel Out-Foxed US Presidents.”].

The Infallible Neocons

And since the neocons are infallible — as far as they’re concerned — the goal can’t be changed. The only option is to escalate the “regime change” planning to include other countries that get in the way, including Iran and now nuclear-armed Russia.

Yes, that’s the ultimate neocon idea — make the Russian economy scream, overthrow the calculating Vladimir Putin and risk having him replaced by some extreme and unstable nationalist with his or her hand on the nuclear button. That may be how life on the planet ends — but there will be evermore “group thinks” and “talking points” right up to the moment of Armageddon. The neocons can never stop generating false narratives.

Meanwhile, the “liberal interventionists” can boast of their own “regime change” — in Libya, a policy promoted by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who delighted at the gruesome

torture-murder of Muammar Gaddafi – “we came, we saw, he died,” she laughed – after having ignored his warnings that the overthrow of his secular government would open the oil-rich country to chaos from radical jihadists, a prediction that has been fulfilled.

Yet, despite this record of spreading chaos and death around the world, the grip that the neocons and liberal hawks have on Official Washington remains almost absolute. They control most of the think tanks – from the Brookings Institution to the American Enterprise Institute – as well as the editorial pages of The Washington Post and The New York Times and pretty much the rest of the mainstream media.

In case you haven’t noticed, the Times’ “news” coverage of the Middle East and Russia has been consistently slanted to favor neocon/liberal-hawk positions. Just as the Times eagerly joined President George W. Bush’s bogus case for invading Iraq in 2003, “the newspaper of record” has peddled false and misleading articles about the crises in Syria and Ukraine as well as promoting anti-Russian propaganda.



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses a crowd on May 9, 2014, celebrating the 69th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Crimean port city of Sevastopol from the Nazis. (Russian government photo)

In this climate of manufactured “reality,” any old-fashioned foreign policy “realist” – especially one who has criticized Israel – cannot expect to win Senate confirmation to any senior position, establishing what amounts to a blacklist against “realists,” such as happened to ex-U.S. Ambassador Chas Freeman whose intelligence appointment was dropped by Obama in his early days out of fear of offending the Israel Lobby and its many neocon backers.

As the rise of those neocons has played out since their emergence during the Reagan administration, the “realists” who were known for cold-hearted foreign policy calculations to protect American interests have aged, died out or otherwise disappeared. They have been largely replaced by ideologues, either neocons with their intense devotion to right-wing Israeli interests or liberal interventionists who almost invariably side with the neocons but cite “humanitarian” concerns to justify “regime change” wars.

Blocking Obama

No matter how foolhardy and deadly these policy prescriptions have been, there is almost no way to dislodge the neocons and liberal hawks inside Official Washington, since they monopolize almost all levers of political and media power.

Even when President Obama tried to collaborate under the table with President Putin to reduce tensions in Syria and Iran in 2013, Obama was quickly outmaneuvered by neocons and liberal hawks inside the State Department who pushed for the putsch in Ukraine in 2014 that effectively destroyed the Obama-Putin cooperation. [See Consortiumnews.com's "What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis."]

I have long argued that the only way to begin to challenge the neocon/liberal-hawk "group thinks" is to release facts about pivotal events, such as the 2013 Syria-sarin case, the 2014 sniper attacks at Kiev's Maidan square, and the 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine. The neocons/liberal hawks currently control all those narratives, using them as clubs to advance ideological agendas just as they did with the false claims about Iraq's WMD. [See Consortiumnews.com's "The Power of False Narrative."]

But other evidence suggests very different scenarios. Obama and his national security team could either release evidence to confirm the accuracy of the "group thinks" or puncture that self-certainty. Instead Obama has chosen to withhold what the U.S. intelligence community knows about these events, all the better to protect the dominant propaganda narratives.

So, the Obama administration continues down a road of tolerating or condoning outrages by its Mideast "allies" as the President and his timid intelligence bureaucrats do nothing to empower the American people with the truth. It is a recipe for worldwide catastrophe.