

The Counter Narrative to US Foreign Policy by Establishment Defectors

By [Ann Robertson](#)

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Publications such as The New York Times, Washington Post, etc. have all but banished criticisms of US foreign policy from their pages. The only acceptable viewpoint seems to be that Putin is a ruthless dictator, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was entirely unprovoked, and Putin will invade other European countries if he is not stopped in Ukraine.

As for the conflict in the Middle East, the mainstream media again lines up obediently behind the US government: Hamas's October 7 attack was unprovoked, Israel is a democracy, Israel is not committing genocide in Gaza, and its military actions in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and Iran are required for self-defense. The few criticisms that are allowed to appear are tepid and unconvincing.

As for US foreign policy, US officials, whether from the Democratic or Republican Party, seem to believe they can promote US interests by resorting primarily to military violence, despite the disasters they have created in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and so on. The refusal to resolve geopolitical differences through diplomacy derives in part from blind arrogance due to unparalleled military superiority and what seems to be pure idiocy. As former Secretary of State **Madeline Albright** boasted in 1998,

“But if we have to use force it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”

It is hard to imagine that anything but disasters could ensue from this myopic perspective.

US government officials simplistically divide the world's nations into two categories: good and evil. Those allied with the US are good and everyone else to one degree or another is evil. “You are either with us or against us;” neutrality is not an option. But this good/evil Manichean ideology has two tragic consequences: First, US officials make little to no effort to understand the rational grounds of the policies of opposing nations and therefore frequently shun diplomacy. After all, the opponents are evil. Second, the mainstream media does not want to appear evil by reporting on the rational grounds of opposing nations; hence, its news coverage and analysis reinforces and legitimates US policy.

But fortunately, a robust counter narrative is growing on the internet with defectors from the mainstream finding venues where they are drawing ever-larger audiences. One such program is Judging Freedom hosted by Judge Andrew Napolitano (he was formerly a judge) who served as an analyst for Fox News until he was let go. His regular guests include world-famous political scientist John Mearsheimer from the University of Chicago; Jeffrey Sachs,

Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and former aide to various Secretary Generals of the United Nation as well as economic advisor to many governments around the world; Alastair Crooke, a former MI6 agent and British diplomat who helped negotiate peace agreements in the Middle East; and Chas Freeman who had various positions in the State and Defense Departments and became Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Other regular guests include Lawrence Wilkerson who was a Colonel in the US military as well as chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Power; Scott Ritter, former weapons inspector for the UN, Ray McGovern and Larry Johnson, both former CIA analysts; and the journalist Max Blumenthal.

Additional venues have popped up and are amplifying these voices. The Duran is hosted by Glenn Diesen, a Norwegian professor; Daniel Davis moderates Deep Dive; and Nima Alkhorshid, who originally is from Iran but now resides in Brazil, hosts Dialogue Works.

Image: President Joe Biden travels to Kyiv, Ukraine Monday, February 20, 2023. (Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz)



While some of these mainstream defectors have been active in Republican administrations and others are closer to the Democratic Party, for the most part they agree that the US government played a huge role in provoking the war in Ukraine, that the war should be brought to an end as quickly as possible through negotiations, that Israel is in fact committing genocide in Gaza and the US government is complicit, that the main obstacle to peace in the Middle East is Israel's rapacious aggression with unconditional US support, and that before October 7, 2023 Gaza was essentially an open-air prison. They are well-worth a hearing since they often provide insider information you cannot find anywhere else, their arguments are supported by plenty of evidence, and they provide the historical context that allows a deeper understanding of a conflict, a context that is almost always lacking in the mainstream media where the belief seems to prevail, for example, that history began on October 7, 2023.

John Mearsheimer delivered a lecturer back in 2015 on why the West in general and the US in particular is principally responsible for the conflict in Ukraine. Since being posted on Youtube, the lecture has attracted 29 million views. He argued that the George W. Bush administration's proposal at the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit to include Ukraine in NATO was highly provocative, foolish and counter to US interests. Both German **Chancellor Angela Merkel** and French **President Nicholas Sarkozy** at the time opposed it, with Merkel claiming its aggressive implications meant Russia would perceive the admission of Ukraine as a "declaration of war." Russia in fact insisted it would pose an existential threat and therefore cross a red line. Mearsheimer points out that the US would never accept a similar move by another great power in relation to the US, citing as evidence the Monroe

doctrine, which bars other great powers from the Western Hemisphere, and the Cuban missile crisis where the US demanded the Soviet Union remove its missiles from Cuba and threatened nuclear war.

Image: Photo shows Drs. Muhanna and Abed caring for an infant and staff mourning three colleagues executed by occupation forces.



Aside from Ukraine, Mearsheimer is highly critical of the US role in the Middle East where he has concluded Israel is committing genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza and where Israel's aggressive expansionist policies as well as its total reliance on military force, far from making it more secure, have achieved exactly the opposite result. Israel is in "deep trouble," he argues, because it has been unable to decisively defeat Hamas in Gaza, it has been unable to win the release of the Israeli hostages, it has been unable to shield northern Israel from Hezbollah's attacks and therefore unable to return the Israeli residents to their northern homes, and it has become a global pariah detested by people around the world because of its genocide against the Palestinian people. Israel's crimes and US complicity in those crimes - Israel could not continue its wars without the steady supply of US weapons - is in neither country's interests, Mearsheimer continues. The US is providing unwavering support above all because of the powerful Zionist lobby in the US which buys politicians like most of us buy groceries. Thanks to the lobby with its huge cash resources, critics of Israel are quickly run out of office. The US has lost the little moral credibility it had on a global scale. And Israel has only succeeded in making itself intensely hated by its Arab neighbors and people with a moral conscience around the world.

Mearsheimer approaches the geopolitical world through the lens of "realism," a political science doctrine that argues the behavior of nations is largely dictated by the logic of the structure within which they are situated. Because there is no international police force that can protect weak nations from stronger nations that might prey on them, every nation aims to maximize its power simply to defend itself from aggressors and survive in this dog-eat-dog world. And when there are multiple great powers, conflict among them is inevitable because each will vie to be the dominant power to escape victimization by the others.

Because of his theoretical grounding, Mearsheimer's conclusions often conflict with those emanating from the good/evil ideological matrix of the US government. For Mearsheimer, being ruthless can be the most rational course of action in the pursuit of survival. Whether it is also a moral course of action is a separate and subordinate question. Survival necessarily trumps all other interests because you cannot pursue morality, for example, if you do not survive. In this way, it makes sense for the US to strive to dominate the western hemisphere, for China to want to dominate east Asia, and for Russia to oppose NATO expansion. It is all about the need to maximize power for survival.

Finally, because Mearsheimer sees the geopolitical structure that defines the relations of nations to one another as relatively stable, he considers the resulting conflicts as often unavoidable as great powers act in their own rational interests and compete for hegemony. Hence, there is a tendency for him to see conflicts persisting “as far as the eye can see” with little hope for resolutions.

While Mearsheimer downplays the role of individual agency and emphasizes the structural relations among nations to explain their interaction, Jeffrey Sachs emphasizes individual agency. As a trained economist he has advised various UN Secretary Generals and has been asked by heads of state around the world for help with their economy. In 1989, for example, he advised the new post-communist Polish government about how to transition from a centrally planned economy to capitalism. To facilitate the transition, Sachs approached the US government and requested aid to help relieve Poland’s debt crisis. By the end of the day, the US government agreed to the aid and Poland’s transition went relatively smoothly. Accordingly, Sachs thinks there are good grounds for believing that individual agency goes a long way in explaining how geopolitics can operate. He often berates US government leaders for choosing military force instead of diplomacy in navigating foreign affairs, admonishing them to grow up and act like adults. Finally, Sachs is in communication with world leaders and can sometimes provide inside information about their thinking. Not surprisingly, they are often quite critical of US foreign policy but would never voice these criticisms publicly.

Alastair Crooke is a star player among these analysts. Because of his background as a Middle East negotiator, he has contacts in the Middle East that supply him with invaluable information that cannot be found in the US mainstream media. Moreover, Crooke has a sophisticated understanding of world events. While Mearsheimer is apt to assume that conflicts will persist indefinitely with apparently little change on the horizon and Sachs is likely to assume events can change suddenly if leaders will just do the right thing, Crooke views individuals constrained by prevailing “paradigms,” somewhat like Mearsheimer, but unlike Mearsheimer emphasizes that these paradigms can themselves undergo fundamental change, which means that everything within the paradigm is altered. For him, “The 7th of October has changed the region for good.” In other words, Crooke views the world dialectically: October 7, 2023 exploded the old paradigm, and we are now witnessing the birth of a new paradigm which has yet to fully develop.

Chas Freeman belongs in his own category. Because of his long career in the US government, one would think his perspective would be saturated with US government propaganda so that he would be unable to empathize with other nations. But quite the contrary, Freeman displays a deep appreciation and respect for other cultures and the rights of other nations as well as an uncanny ability to see the world from their point of view. From this perspective he does not hesitate to criticize US government policies, particularly the inveterate recourse to military force and the refusal to take into consideration the legitimate concerns of other nations such as NATO expansion for Russia. Freeman labels members of the Israeli government as fascist and argues the government operates against Israel’s self-interests, not to mention the interests of the US. He often treats the audience to pithy formulations. For example: Give a blank check to an alcoholic and he will go out and buy alcohol; give Netanyahu a blank check and he will go out and start a war. And in relation to the war in Ukraine: the US will fight to the last Ukrainian.

The counter narrative waged by these mainstream voices on the internet is having an

impact on public opinion. Although the US government routinely ignores public opinion when formulating policy, at times the public breaks through and exerts an influence. Mass demonstrations in US streets helped bring the US war in Vietnam to a close. Currently, the Arab streets are boiling over with anger towards Israel for its genocide in Gaza and this is pushing their leaders in a new direction. At a recent summit in Riyadh that included a representative from Iran, Mohammed bin Salman warned Israel not to attack Iran and condemned Israel for its genocide in Gaza. Iran's president was not able to attend but phoned the Crown Prince in advance and expressed the hope of deeper cooperation between their two countries. After years of hostile relations, the two are now drawing together even to the point of staging a joint naval exercise, a development that would have been unimaginable not long ago.

Whether we agree with other people or not, we are always in a stronger position when we hear their arguments and adjust our position if necessary. These internet programs provide us with that opportunity and allow us to escape from the monotone, group-think line of the mainstream media.

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Ann Robertson is a Lecturer Faculty emeritus of the Philosophy Department at San Francisco State University and can be reached at arobert@sfsu.edu.

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