

Global Economic Crisis: The Latest Cumulative Impact of America's Aggressive "Regime Change" Strategy

The Case for Pragmatism

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Crashing global stock markets – punctuated by the bracing 1,000-plus point drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average at the start of Monday's trading before a partial bounce-back – are a reminder about the interdependence of today's world economy and a wake-up call to those who think that the neocon-driven ideology of endless chaos doesn't carry a prohibitively high price.

The hard truth is that there is a limit to the amount of neocon-induced trouble that the planet can absorb without major dislocations of the international economic system – and we may be testing that limit now. The problem is that America's neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks continue to put their ideological priorities ahead of what's good for the average person on earth.

In other words, it may make sense for some neocon think tank or a "human rights" NGO to demand interventions via "hard power" (military action) or "soft power" (economic sanctions, propaganda or other non-military means). After all, neocon think tanks raise money from self-interested sectors, such as the Military-Industrial Complex, and non-governmental organizations always have their hands out for donations from the U.S. government or friendly billionaires.

But the chaos that these neocons and liberal interventionists inflict on the world – often justified by claims about "democracy promotion" and "human rights" – typically ends up creating conditions of far greater horror than the meddling was meant to stop.

For instance, the Islamic State butchers and their former parent organization, Al Qaeda, are transforming Iraq and Syria into blood-soaked killing fields. But the neocons and liberal hawks still think the higher priority was and is to eliminate the relatively stable and prosperous dictatorships of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

There is always a fixation about getting rid of some designated "bad guy" even if the result is some "far-worse guys." This has been a pattern repeated over and over again, from Libya to Sudan/South Sudan to Ukraine/Russia to Venezuela (just to name a few). In such cases, we see the neocons/liberal hawks release a flood of propaganda against some unpleasant target (Libya's Muammar Gaddafi/Sudan's Omar al-Bashir/Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovich/Russia's Vladimir Putin/Venezuela's Hugo Chavez or Nicolas Maduro) followed by demands for "regime change" or at least punishing economic sanctions.

Anyone who tries to provide some balance to offset the propaganda is denounced as a “(fill-in-the-blank) apologist” and pushed out of the room of acceptable debate. Then, with no one in Official Washington left to challenge the “group think,” the only question is how extreme should the punishment be – direct military assault (as in Iraq, Libya and Syria), a political coup d’etat (as in Ukraine and almost in Venezuela) or economic sanctions (as in Russia and Sudan).

For many Americans trying to do international business, it can be confusing as to where the legal lines are, who is or who isn’t on some black list, what kinds of transactions are allowed or forbidden. I know of one counselor who helps people overcome stuttering who had to reject Skype lessons with a prospective patient in Iran because it wasn’t clear whether that might violate the draconian U.S. sanctions regime.

Spreading the Chaos

Arguably some narrowly focused sanctions against a particularly nefarious foreign leader might make sense. Even a limited military intervention might not upset the entire world’s economy. But the proliferation of these strategies has combined to destabilize not just the targeted regimes but nations far from the front lines and is now contributing to global economic chaos.

In tracing these patterns, you can go back in time to such misguided fiascos as the CIA’s huge covert operation in Afghanistan in the 1980s (which gave rise to the Taliban and Al Qaeda). However, for argument’s sake, let’s start with the neocon success in promoting President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003. Not only did that war divert more than \$1 trillion in U.S. taxpayers’ money from productive uses into destructive ones, but it began a massive spread of chaos across the Middle East.

Add in President Barack Obama’s 2011 “humanitarian” interventions in Libya (via Western bombing operations to topple Muammar Gaddafi’s regime) and in Syria (via covert support for rebels and sanctions against President Assad’s government) – and you have two more Mad Max scenarios in two once relatively prosperous Arab states.

These human catastrophes have sent waves of refugees crashing into other Mideast countries and into Europe where the European Union was already stumbling economically, still trying to recover from Wall Street’s 2007-08 financial crisis. After tasting the bitter medicine of austerity for years, Europeans now find their fairly generous welfare systems stretched to the breaking point by refugees seeking asylum.

Having just returned from a visit to Europe, I was struck by the intensity of feelings about the refugee crisis. Some EU nations are throwing up anti-migrant barriers while everyone seems to be squabbling over who should foot the bill at a time when there are financial crises in Greece and other southern-tier countries, which coincidentally are bearing the brunt of the refugee problem.

Toss into this volatile mix of a Europe seemingly close to explosion the Obama administration’s “neocon/liberal interventionist” policies toward Ukraine, where neocon holdover Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland helped orchestrate a 2014 coup to remove democratically elected President Yanukovich after he was demonized in the U.S. mainstream media as corrupt.

Citing “democracy promotion” and “anti-corruption,” the Obama administration backed the creation of a coup regime that has relied on [neo-Nazi and Islamist militias](#) to serve as its tip of the spear against ethnic Russian Ukrainians who have resisted the ouster of Yanukovich. Thousands — mostly eastern Ukrainians — have died. Of course, all this was explained to the American people as a simple case of “Russian aggression.”

After the coup, when the ethnic Russians of Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, that became a “Russian invasion,” justifying harsh economic sanctions against Moscow, with the Obama administration strong-arming the Europeans to forgo their profitable trade relations with Russia to punish the Russian economy. But that also added to the pressure on the European economy.

As this madness has escalated, the neocons and their liberal-hawk pals now envision destabilizing the Putin government in nuclear-armed Russia. They don’t seem to recognize that the guy who might follow Putin may not be some obliging Boris Yeltsin but a hard-line ultranationalist ready to brandish the Kremlin’s nuclear arsenal in defense of Mother Russia.

Misguided Interventions

While these various U.S. “hard” and “soft” power interventions are justified by the principles of “human rights,” they often end up working against that goal. A discrete example is the case of Sudan and South Sudan, a crisis that traces back to the demands for a “humanitarian intervention” over Sudan’s alleged genocide in Darfur in 2003.

That horrible conflict was painted in stark black and white colors in the U.S. press, innocent good guys versus evil bad guys, but was actually much more nuanced than what was shown to the American people. The war was touched off by Darfur rebels, but the Sudanese army struck back brutally. The “human rights” community settled on Sudan’s President Bashir as the designated villain, who now faces an indictment in the International Criminal Court.

So, there was great sympathy for carving South Sudan away from Sudan in 2011 and making it an independent country (although oddly Darfur remained part of Sudan). But South Sudan, which possesses significant oil reserves, could sustain itself only if it could get its oil to market and the pipelines went north through Sudan.

And, since the United States and other countries were busy sanctioning Sudan for not turning over Bashir to the ICC, oil companies were unable to assist South Sudan in exploiting its valuable resource, which in turn caused hardship in South Sudan and contributed to a bloody civil war pitting one tribe against another. That led to, you guessed it, calls to sanction South Sudan.

The ongoing tragedy of Sudan/South Sudan is horrific enough, but it is only emblematic of the unintended consequences of rigid neocon/liberal interventionist ideology, which rejects negotiations with “bad guys,” insisting instead on “regime change” or endless punishment of entire populations through sanctions even when those “solutions” inflict more hardship and death.

But now these destructive strategies are going global. They are threatening the economic well-being of the entire planet – taking their place along with other misguided theories such as “free-market” absolutism and “austerity” in the face of recessions. The cumulative impact from these various follies has been to put the West’s Middle Class under severe

pressure regarding income and purchasing power, which finally has slowed China's growth and prompted a crash of its financial markets.

That, in turn, is reverberating back across the rest of the world's stock markets, erasing trillions of dollars in wealth and further reducing the savings of the Middle Class. As this vicious cycle starts spinning, that could mean even less consumer spending and further economic retrenchment.

The prospects for a global recession, if not a full-scale depression, can no longer be ignored. And such economic hardship would only contribute to more death, devastation and destabilization.

Pragmatic Solutions

So what can be done? As dark as the gathering economic storm may be, one silver lining could be that Americans and other Westerners will finally begin pushing back against the powerful neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist fellow-travelers.

Perhaps, instead of President Obama's Iranian nuclear deal being a one-off affair that may barely survive a determined neocon assault in the U.S. Congress, it could become a model for pragmatic approaches to other international crises. The core of this pragmatism would be that one doesn't have to love or even like the leadership of another country to cooperate on global concerns, whether they are economic, geopolitical or environmental.

There also should be a recognition that no country has all the answers or a monopoly on morality. American self-righteousness is not only hypocritical – given the many flaws in the U.S. political system from the buying of our campaigns to our repeated violations of international law – but it is self-defeating, requiring the endless expenditure of blood and treasure to act as self-appointed global “policeman” whether the world wants it or not.

If pragmatism replaced exceptionalism as the focus of U.S. international relations, there would be some obvious moves that could reduce world tensions and alleviate some of the economic dislocations that are contributing to the deepening economic crisis.

For instance, instead of a potential nuclear confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, what's wrong with the eastern Ukrainians receiving more autonomy and the right to keep their Russian language? Why shouldn't the people of Crimea have the right to break their political bonds with Kiev and renew them with Moscow? Why has President Obama bent to the neocon prescriptions of Assistant Secretary Nuland when a little give-and-take could make life better for Ukrainians, Russians and Europeans?

Similarly, why can't the United States accept a compromise in Syria that includes power-sharing for whatever moderate Sunnis remain and accepts at least the temporary continuation of President Assad's rule as part of a secular state protecting the lives and interests of Christians, Shiites, Alawites and other minorities? Why not a joint U.S.-Russian-Iranian effort to stabilize the war-torn country, block the expansion of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, and ease the refugee crisis in the Mideast and Europe?

Yes, I realize that geopolitical pragmatism is anathema to many power centers of Official Washington, particularly the influential neocons, their benefactors in the Israel Lobby and the Military-Industrial Complex, and the many self-interested NGOs of the “human rights” community which favor “humanitarian wars” and seem to care little if their purity leads to

even more suffering.

But – as the world’s economy teeters and global markets tumble – the American people no longer have the luxury of intervening willy-nilly around the globe. International pragmatism, including working with adversaries, may be the only way to prevent the swelling geopolitical pressures from building into a devastating financial crash.

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