

Would a Clinton Win Mean More Wars?

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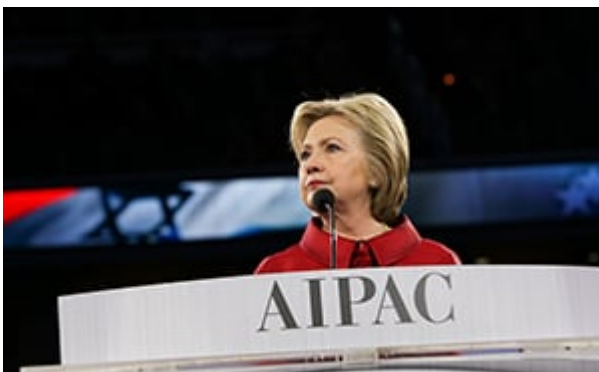
The Democratic Party establishment seems determined to drag Hillary Clinton's listless campaign across the finish line of her race with Bernie Sanders and then count on Republican divisions to give her a path to the White House. But - if she gets there - the world should hold its breath.

If Clinton becomes President, she will be surrounded by a neocon-dominated American foreign policy establishment that will press her to resume its "regime change" strategies in the Middle East and escalate its new and dangerous Cold War against Russia.

If Bashar al-Assad is still president of Syria, there will be demands that she finally go for the knock-out blow; there will pressure, too, for her to ratchet up sanctions on Iran pushing Tehran toward renouncing the nuclear agreement; there are already calls for deploying more U.S. troops on Russia's border and integrating Ukraine into the NATO military structure.

President Clinton-45 would hear the clever talking points justifying these moves, the swaggering tough-guy/gal rhetoric, and the tear-jerking propaganda about evil enemies throwing babies off incubators, giving Viagra to soldiers to rape more women, and committing horrific crimes (some real but many imagined) against defenseless innocents.

Image: Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressing the AIPAC conference in Washington D.C. on March 21, 2016. (Photo credit: AIPAC)



Does anyone think that Hillary Clinton has the wisdom to resist these siren songs of confrontation and war, even if she were inclined to?

President Barack Obama, who - for all his faults - has a much deeper and subtler intellect than Hillary Clinton, found himself so battered by these pressures from the militaristic Washington "playbook" that he [whined](#) about his predicament to The Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg, himself a neocon war hawk.

The Washington foreign policy establishment is now so profoundly in the hands of the neocons and their “liberal interventionist” sidekicks that the sitting President presumably couldn’t find anyone but a neocon to give those interviews to, even as he complained about how the U.S. capital is in the hands of warmongers.

Given this neocon domination of U.S. foreign policy – especially in the State Department bureaucracy, the major media and the big think tanks – Clinton will be buffeted by hawkish demands and plans both from outside of her administration and from within.

Already key neocons, such as the Brookings Institution’s Robert Kagan, are signaling that they expect to have substantial influence over Clinton’s foreign policy. Kagan, who has repackaged himself as a “liberal interventionist,” [threw his support](#) to Clinton, who put him on a State Department advisory board.

There is also talk in Washington that Kagan’s neocon wife, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, another Clinton favorite and the architect of the “regime change” in Ukraine, would be in line for a top foreign policy job in a Clinton-45 administration.

Neocons Back in Charge

So, Clinton’s election could mean that some of the most dangerous people in American foreign policy would be whispering their schemes for war and more war directly into her ear – and her record shows that she is very susceptible to such guidance.



Image: Prominent neocon intellectual Robert Kagan. (Photo credit: Mariusz Kubik, <http://www.mariuszkubik.pl>)

At every turn, as a U.S. senator and as Secretary of State, Clinton has opted for “regime change” solutions – from the Iraq invasion in 2003 to the Honduras coup in 2009 to the Libyan air war in 2011 to the Syria civil war since 2011 – or she has advocated for the escalation of conflicts, such as in Afghanistan and with Iran, rather than engaging in reasonable give-and-take negotiations.

Though her backers tout her experience as Secretary of State, the reality was that she

repeatedly disdained genuine diplomacy and was constantly hectoring President Obama into adopting the most violent and confrontational options.

He sometimes did (the Afghan “surge,” the Libyan war, the Iran nuclear stand-off) but he sometimes didn’t (reversing the Afghan escalation, finally negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran after Clinton left, rejecting a direct U.S. military assault on the Syrian government, and working at times with the Russians on Iran and Syria).

In other words, Obama acted as a register or brake restraining Clinton’s hawkishness. With Clinton as the President, however, she would have no such restraints. One could expect her to endorse many if not all the harebrained neocon schemes, much as President George W. Bush did when his neocon advisers exploited his fear and fury over 9/11 to guide him into their “regime change” agenda for the Middle East.

The neocons have never given up their dreams of overthrowing Mideast governments that Israel has put on its enemies list. Iraq was only the first. To follow were Syria and Iran with the idea that by installing pro-Israeli leaders in those countries, Israel’s close-in enemies – Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups – could be isolated and crushed.

After Bush’s Iraq invasion in 2003, Washington’s neocons were joking about whether Iran or Syria should come next, with the punch line: “Real men go to Tehran!” But the Iraq War wasn’t the “cakewalk” that the neocons had predicted. Instead of throwing flowers at the U.S. troops, Iraqis planted IEDs.

As it turned out, a lot of “real men” and “real women” – as well as “real children” – died in Iraq, including nearly 4,500 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

So the neocon timetable took a hit but, in their view, only because of Bush’s incompetent follow-through on Iraq. If not for the botched occupation, the neocons felt they could have continued rolling up other troublesome regimes, one after another.

Professionally, the neocons also escaped the Iraq disaster largely unscathed, continuing to dominate Washington’s think tanks and the op-ed pages of major American news outlets such as The Washington Post and The New York Times. Barely missing a beat, they set about planning for the longer haul.

An Obama Mistake

Although they lost the White House in 2008, the neocons caught a break when President-elect Obama opted for a Lincoln-esque “team of rivals” on foreign policy. Instead of reaching out to Washington’s marginalized (and aging) foreign policy “realists,” Obama looked to the roster of the neocon-dominated establishment.

Obama recruited his hawkish Democratic rival, Sen. Hillary Clinton, to be Secretary of State and kept Bush’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Obama also left in place most of Bush’s military high command, including neocon favorite, General David Petraeus.

Obama’s naïve management strategy let the neocons and their “liberal interventionist” pals consolidate their bureaucratic control of Washington’s foreign policy bureaucracy, even though the President favored a more “realist” approach that would use America’s power more judiciously — and he was less enthralled to Israel’s right-wing government.



Image: Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland during a press conference at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, Ukraine, on Feb. 7, 2014. (U.S. State Department photo)

The behind-the-scenes neocon influence became especially pronounced at Clinton's State Department where she tapped the likes of Nuland, a neocon ideologue and an adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, to become the department's spokesperson and put her on track to become Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (although the appointment wasn't finalized until after Clinton left in 2013).

The neocon/liberal-hawk bias is now so strong inside the State Department that officials I know who have gone there reemerge as kind of "pod people" spouting arrogant talking points in support of U.S. intervention all over the world. By contrast, I find the CIA and the Pentagon to be places of relative realism and restraint.

Perhaps the best example of this "pod people" phenomenon was Sen. John Kerry, who replaced Clinton as Secretary of State and suddenly became the mouthpiece for the bureaucracy's most extreme war-like rhetoric.

For instance, Kerry advocated a retaliatory bombing campaign against Syria's military in August 2013, ignoring the intelligence community's doubts about whether President Bashar al-Assad's regime was responsible for a sarin-gas attack outside Damascus.

Instead of listening to the intelligence analysts, Kerry fell in line behind the neocon-driven "group think" pinning the blame on Assad, the perfect excuse for implementing the neocons' long-delayed Syrian "regime change." The neocons didn't care what the facts were — and Kerry fell in line. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[What's the Matter with John Kerry?](#)"]

But Obama didn't fall in line. He [listened](#) when Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told him that there was no "slam dunk" evidence implicating the Syrian military. (Ultimately, [the evidence](#) would point to a provocation carried out by Islamic extremists trying to trick the U.S. military into intervening in the war on their side.)



Image: Director of National Intelligence James Clapper (right) talks with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office, with John Brennan and other national security aides present. (Photo credit: Office of Director of National Intelligence)

Obama also got help from Russian President Vladimir Putin who persuaded President Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons (while Assad still denied any role in the sarin-gas attack). Putin's assistance infuriated the neocons who soon recognized that the Obama-Putin cooperation was a profound threat to their "regime change" enterprise.

Targeting Ukraine

Some of the smarter [neocons quickly identified Ukraine as a potential wedge](#) that could be driven between Obama and Putin. Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, called Ukraine "the biggest prize" and a potential first step toward driving Putin from power in Russia.

It fell to Assistant Secretary of State Nuland to shepherd the Ukraine operation to fulfillment as she plotted with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt how to remove Ukraine's pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. Nuland and Pyatt were caught in [an intercepted phone call](#) discussing who should take over.

"Yats is the guy," Nuland said referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk who indeed would become the new prime minister. Nuland and Pyatt [then exchanged ideas](#) how to "glue this thing" and how to "midwife this thing." This "thing" became the bloody Feb. 22, 2014 coup ousting elected President Yanukovich and touching off a civil war between Ukrainian "nationalists" from the west and Ukraine's ethnic Russians in the east.

As the "nationalists," some of them openly neo-Nazis, inflicted atrocities on ethnic Russians, Crimea voted by 96 percent to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia. Resistance to the new Kiev regime also arose in the eastern Donbas region.

To the State Department - and the mainstream U.S. news media - this conflict was all explained as "Russian aggression" against Ukraine and a "Russian invasion" of Crimea (although Russian troops were already in Crimea as part of the Sevastopol naval base agreement). But All the Important People agreed that the Crimean referendum was a "sham" (although [many polls have since confirmed](#) the results).

When citizen Clinton weighed in on the Ukraine crisis, she compared Russian President Putin to Hitler.

So, today the neocon/liberal-hawk Washington "playbook" - as Obama would call it - calls

for massing more and more U.S. troops and NATO weapons systems on Russia's border to deter Putin's "aggression."



Image: A scene from "Dr. Strangelove," in which the bomber pilot (played by actor Slim Pickens) rides a nuclear bomb to its target in the Soviet Union.

These tough guys and gals also vow to ignore Russia's warnings against what it views as military threats to its existence. Apparently "real, real men" go to Moscow (perhaps riding a nuclear bomb like the famous seen from "Dr. Strangelove.").

Ian Joseph Brzezinski, a State Department official under President George W. Bush and now a foreign policy expert for the Atlantic Council, a NATO think tank, has co-authored [an article](#) urging NATO to incorporate Ukrainian army units into its expansion of military operations along Russia's border.

"High-level Ukrainian national security officials have urged the international community to be bolder in its response to Russia's provocative military actions," wrote Brzezinski (son of old Cold Warrior Zbigniew Brzezinski) and Ukrainian co-author Markian Bilynskyj.

"The deployment of a battle tested, Ukrainian infantry company or larger unit to reinforce the defense of NATO territory in Central Europe would be a positive contribution to the Alliance force posture in the region."

Following the Playbook

This kind of tough-talking jargon is what the next President, whoever he or she is, can expect from Official Washington. From Obama's interview in The Atlantic, it's clear that he feels surrounded and embattled by these warmongering forces but takes some pride in resisting - from time to time - the Washington "playbook."

But how would President Hillary Clinton respond? When she [appeared](#) before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on March 21 - at a moment when it appeared she had all but nailed down the Democratic nomination - Clinton showed what you might call her true colors, fawning over how loyal she would be to Israel and promising to take the very cozy relationship between the U.S. and Israel "to the next level" (a phrase that usually applies to couples deciding to move in together).

By reviewing Clinton's public record, one could reasonably conclude that she is herself a neocon, both in her devotion to Israel and her proclivity toward "regime change" solutions. She also follows the neocon lead in demonizing any foreign leader who gets in their way. But even if she isn't a full-fledged neocon, she often bends to their demands.

The one possible deviation from this pattern is Clinton’s personal friendship with longtime adviser Sidney Blumenthal, who was an early critic of the neoconservatives as they emerged as a powerful force during the Reagan administration. Blumenthal and his son Max have also dared criticize Israel’s abusive treatment of the Palestinians.

However, the Israel Lobby appears to be taking no chances that Sidney Blumenthal’s voice might be heard during a Clinton-45 administration. Last month, a pro-Zionist group, The World Values Network, [bought a full-page ad](#) in The New York Times to attack Blumenthal and his son and declared that “Hillary Clinton must disavow her anti-Israel advisors.”



Image: A graphic from The World Values Network’s attack on Sidney and Max Blumenthal.

Though Clinton might not publicly disassociate herself from Sidney Blumenthal, the preemptive strike pushed him further toward the margins and helped clear the path for the Kagan/Nuland faction to rush to the center of Clinton’s foreign policy.

Indeed, Clinton’s primary focus if she gets elected is likely to be ensuring that she gets reelected. As a traditional politician, she would think that the way to achieve reelection is to stay on the good side of the Israeli leadership. Along those lines, she promised AIPAC that, as President, she would immediately invite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House.

So, what would happen if Clinton takes the U.S.-Israeli relationship “to the next level”? Presumably that would mean taking a super-hard line against Iran over last year’s nuclear deal. Yet, already [Iran is questioning](#) whether its acceptance of extraordinary constraints on its nuclear program was worth it, given the U.S. unwillingness to grant meaningful relief on economic sanctions.

A belligerent Clinton approach – decrying Iran’s behavior and imposing new sanctions – would strengthen Iran’s hard-line faction internally and might well lead to Iran renouncing the agreement on the grounds of American bad faith. That, of course, would please the neocons and Netanyahu by putting the “bomb-bomb-bomb Iran” option back in play.

A Stunning Reversal

Clinton may have viewed her AIPAC speech as the beginning of her long-awaited “pivot to the center” — finally freed from having to pander to progressives — but afterwards she suffered a string of primary and caucus defeats at the hands of Sen. Bernie Sanders, most by landslide margins.

Besides those stunning defeats, Clinton’s campaign clearly has an “enthusiasm gap.” Sanders, the 74-year-old “democratic socialist” from Vermont, draws huge and excited crowds and wins younger voters by staggering percentages. Meanwhile, Clinton confronts polls showing high negatives and extraordinary public distrust.



Image: Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who is seeking the Democratic presidential nomination.

If she gets the Democratic nomination, she may have little choice but to engage in a fiercely negative campaign since — faced with the lack of voter enthusiasm — her best chance of winning is to so demonize her Republican opponent that Democrats and independents will be driven to the polls out of fear of what the crazy GOP madman might do.

Right now, many Clinton supporters see her as the “safe” — not exciting — choice, a politician whose long résumé gives them comfort that she must know what’s she’s doing. African-American voters, who have been her most loyal constituency, apparently feel more comfortable with someone they’ve known (who has also served in the Obama administration) than Sanders who is unknown to many and is seen as someone whose ambitious programs appear less practical than Clinton’s small-bore ideas.

But a look behind Clinton’s résumé, especially her reliance on “regime change” and other interventionist schemes in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, might give all peace-loving voters pause. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[Is Hillary Clinton ‘Qualified?’](#)”]

Savvy neocons, like Robert Kagan, have long understood that Clinton could be their Trojan Horse, pulled into the White House by Democratic voters. Kagan [told](#) The New York Times,

“I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it’s something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.”

The same Times article noted that Clinton “remains the vessel into which many interventionists are pouring their hopes.” However, if she is that “vessel” carrying a neocon foreign policy back into the White House, this “safe” choice might prove dangerous to America and the world.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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