

Regime Change at the Pentagon. Neocons Triumphant in Washington and Geneva

It's either 1938 or 2001 again

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Global Research, December 04, 2014

[The Unz Review](#)

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The forced resignation of Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defense and the continued prorogation of talks with Iran in Geneva might not seem to be connected but they are both major triumphs for the confrontational neoconservative foreign policy that continues to prevail in Washington in spite of repeated failures overseas. And, of course, they are both at least in part about Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [expressed his delight](#) at learning that the negotiations with Iran have again failed to produce an agreement. It also pleased Senator John McCain who then [called for](#) "increased sanctions and requirement that any final deal between Iran and the United States be sent to Congress for approval." Per McCain, only the legislature can provide the necessary wisdom to avoid a bad deal with the Mullahs.

Hagel's resignation is [being packaged](#) as response to excessive micromanaging from President Barack Obama's White House regarding appropriate measures to be taken to "destroy" ISIS, deal with Syria and aid Iraq. In truth, Chuck Hagel was reflecting informed opinion among the Pentagon's top ranking military personnel [in confronting](#) National Security Adviser Susan Rice over the chaotic and constantly shifting series of responses to a growing Middle Eastern crisis. Generals and Admirals may be pompous self-serving asses but they are not stupid.

Unlike Hagel, Obama's inner circle national security team consisting of Samantha Power, Susan Rice and Valerie Jarrett are all cut from the same cloth as the president. They are academics who come from privileged backgrounds and have, as the expression goes, no skin in the game. Their children will not be dying in some hell hole and for them it is a self-serving complete abstraction to use American power to "fix things" and undertake "humanitarian interventions" overseas.

Chuck Hagel by contrast experienced Vietnam as a grunt and saw considerable combat, for which he was decorated. Even though he has most often gone along to get along while a Senator and even more so as Secretary of Defense, his life experience has nevertheless made him reluctant to view war as a first option and he was widely seen as a peace candidate when he briefly considered a presidential run in 2008. There were high hopes that when he joined the Obama team he would serve as a voice for reason and moderation.

Hagel is also partly a victim of Israel first policies. He was guilty of a [mortal sin by saying](#) when he was a Senator that "the Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people on Capitol Hill" and "I'm not an Israeli senator. I'm a United States senator." Since that transgression he has never been trusted by the Lobby, which was unsuccessful in blocking his nomination

after pulling out all the stops during his confirmation hearings two years ago. As the approval of Hagel by the Senate was at that time widely viewed as a major defeat for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Robert Cohen, its current president, is probably smiling as he observes smugly that revenge is a dish best eaten cold.

So now Hagel is going, going gone, likely to be replaced by someone with whom both the neocons and the liberal interventionists will be more comfortable. That will almost certainly be an accommodating personality willing to uncritically join what Colonel Pat Lang has [rightly described](#) as the White House's "children's crusade."

The fall of Hagel combined with the probability of a Congressionally-driven new, harder line from Obama sits well with some constituencies. Bill Kristol of the *Weekly Standard* [puts it succinctly](#) from his viewpoint of what is important, "America has the misfortune to have an anti-Israel president for two more years. America has the good fortune to have a pro-Israel Congress for that same period of time. It should be a priority for that Congress, through speech and deed, to signal unequivocally to Israel and its enemies that terror and pressure against Israel will not succeed, and that America stands with Israel in our common fight against terror and barbarism."

The incoming Republican majority also appears to be wonderful news for the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which held its [annual bash](#) in New York City on November 23rd. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas was the featured speaker, asserting that "threats to Israel have never been greater" while basking in repeated chants from the attendees of "Go Ted Go!" ZOA President Mort Klein labeled Hamas as a "Nazi like terrorist group whose charter calls for the murder of every Jew" before taking several jabs at Obama, describing the American president as "A Chamberlain in the White House." Neville, that is. For Klein and other neocons it is always 1938 and we are always in Munich. Pastor John Hagee of Christians United for Israel went one better, calling Obama the "most anti-Semitic president ever."

And then there is Iran, whose alleged "interference" in Iraq apparently thwarted American plans to turn Baghdad into Stockholm. It is also reliably the perpetual "threat" used to justify any and all of Israel's misbehavior. Given the gathering storm being summoned up by Israel's friends, the Obama administration would have been well served by closing the deal with Tehran, but it failed to do so. The prolonging of the timetable for the talks in Geneva is not necessarily a death sentence, but it does give both time and the organizational advantage to Congress, which, with its new Republican majority, will almost certainly move to block or torpedo any agreement. If the friends of Israel can muster up the 67 Senate votes needed to be veto proof they will undoubtedly punish Iran yet again with sanctions, a move that will undoubtedly end any chance for a compromise. And even though the Republicans do not themselves control all the needed votes there are plenty of Democrats who love Israel inordinately and will likely vote with the GOP. Senator Elizabeth Warren, reliably progressive [except when it comes to Palestine](#), has just had her first meeting with Netanyahu, an [important ticket punch](#) on her career trajectory if she wants to become president. She is not alone in doing her obeisance but will have to out-Israel Hillary Clinton, something that may not be possible.

But at the end of the day, the greatest neocon triumph is its continued grip over policy with Russia, which is the sole power in the world that can attack and destroy much of the United States. The confrontation with Moscow makes no sense as the only United States vital

interest at stake is to maintain a good working relationship, but the tension continues to mount. State Department Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, who was the enabler of the Ukraine crisis earlier this year, [recently showed up](#) in Riga Latvia where she pledged that American soldiers and their European counterparts are “ready to give our lives for the security of these countries.” She was referring to the Baltic States, raising the rather serious question whether or not Americans should be prepared to die for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Nuland’s allusion to giving “our lives” should surely be regarded as poetic license on her part as the only way a neocon could possibly die tragically would be if he or she were to choke on a piece of foie gras. She surely understands but chooses to ignore the fact that Latvia is only part of NATO due to the unwise expansion of what was originally a defensive alliance after the fall of the Soviet Union. The expansion was itself a violation of the understanding between Moscow and Washington that the West would not take advantage of the situation to extend its sphere of influence into Eastern Europe. Latvia’s defense is in no way important to the security of the United States unlike the actual threat posed by the Warsaw Pact [up until 1991](#). Indeed, Latvia was part of the Warsaw Pact back then. Protecting Latvia as a policy is all too reminiscent of the lead ups to both the first and second World Wars. In 1914, a series of mutual defense agreements led to armed confrontation after an Austrian Archduke was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist. In 1939, Britain and France were drawn into a war with Germany after giving security guarantees to Poland even though they had no critical interests at stake. Sixteen million died in 1914-8 followed by an additional 60 million in 1939-45.

That the White House has fired a voice for restraint and moderation at the Pentagon is perhaps inevitable. That it is simultaneously increasing its combatant role in an unwinnable confrontation in Iraq and Syria which it helped create, is again taking on the Taliban in Afghanistan, has backed away from cutting a deal with Iran that would have eased tensions in a key part of the world, and is needlessly provoking Moscow for reasons that must be inscrutable to any observer is a bit difficult to grasp. And, of course, the package includes standing beside Israel right or wrong. But that is what being a neocon is all about, apart from never having to say you’re sorry. Or wrong. We’ve got that fine expensive military just sitting around and by God we are going to use it. And someday the whole world will look and behave just like Peoria.

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