

The Network of Powerful Israel Partisans Who Are Pushing to Bomb Iran

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In a recent TV ad, a van snakes its way through an American city. As the driver fiddles with the radio dial, dire warnings about the perils of a “nuclear Iran” spill out of the speaker from Senator Lindsey Graham and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The driver then steers the vehicle into a parking garage, drives to the top level, and blows it up in a blinding flash of white light. Words shimmer across the screen: “No Iran Nuclear Treaty Without Congressional Approval.”

While diplomats from Iran and the “P5+1” world powers work to forge a peaceful resolution to the decade-long standoff over Iran’s nuclear enrichment program, a well-financed network of “experts” — like the “[American Security Initiative](#)” that produced the above “Special Delivery” ad — is dedicating enormous amounts of time and energy to weakening public support for the talks in the United States.

These think-tank gurus, special interest groups, and media pundits have peddled a plethora of alarmist narratives aimed at scuttling the diplomatic process — and they’ve relied far more on fear mongering than facts.

So who are these people?

A Close-Knit Network

Despite their bipartisan façade, these reflexively anti-Iran ideologues are in reality a tight-knit group. Many were also prominent supporters of the Iraq War and other foreign policy debacles from the last 15 years. They work in close coordination with one another and are often bankrolled by similar funders.

Four GOP super-donors alone — the billionaires [Sheldon Adelson](#), [Paul Singer](#), [Bernard Marcus](#), and [Seth Klarman](#) — keep afloat an array of groups that ceaselessly advocate confrontation with Iran, like the [Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#), the [American Enterprise Institute](#), and the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#).

Other groups forming the core of this network include the neoconservative [Hudson Institute](#) and the [Foreign Policy Initiative](#), as well as more explicitly hardline “pro-Israel” groups like the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#), the [Republican Jewish Coalition](#), the [Emergency Committee for Israel](#), [The Israel Project](#), and the [Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs](#).

Several of these outfits also rely on right-wing grant-making foundations such as the [Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation](#) and the [Scaife Foundations](#), which together funnel millions into hardline policy shops.

Hardline Senators

Together these groups have established what amounts to their own echo chamber. They've built an anti-Iran communications and lobbying infrastructure that enjoys substantial influence in Washington's corridors of power, particularly in Congress.

One of this network's more prominent beneficiaries has been Senator [Tom Cotton](#) (R-AR), a through-and-through neocon disciple whose truculent opposition to the Iran talks has given pause to even conservative figures like Fox News' Megyn Kelly, who [asked him](#) what the "point" was of his infamous [open letter to Iran last March](#) that was signed by 47 Senate Republicans. Other prominent senators with close ties to this network include Cotton's Republican colleagues [Lindsey Graham](#), [Mark Kirk](#), [Kelly Ayotte](#), and [John McCain](#).

Cotton's successful run for Senate last year came on the heels of massive financial contributions [he received](#) from key members of the anti-Iran lobby, including [Bill Kristol's](#) Emergency Committee for Israel, which spent roughly \$1 million to get Cotton elected. Adelson, Singer, and Klarman, as well as the PAC run by former UN ambassador and avowed militarist [John Bolton](#), also [contributed](#) significantly to Cotton's campaign.

While some pundits and politicians say they're looking for a "better deal" with Iran than the one the Obama administration has negotiated, Cotton [has explicitly said](#) that he's looking for no deal at all. He's called an end to the nuclear negotiations an "intended consequence" of legislation he's supported to impose new sanctions on Iran and give Congress an up-or-down vote on the agreement.

Think Tank Warriors

In the think tank world, talking heads like the Hudson Institute's [Michael Doran](#) and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' [Mark Dubowitz](#) and [Clifford May](#) still prefer the more cautious "better deal" framing. But discerning readers will quickly realize that their motives are bent towards pushing the United States into conflict with Iran.

Doran — who in the past [has compared](#) the Middle East to a "disease" and argued that "a bias toward military action is the best way to treat" it — has been one of the leading purveyors of the idea that the Obama administration's nuclear negotiations with Iran are [geared towards](#) turning Iran into "a friend and a partner," which he frames as essentially akin to the sky falling.

In April, he lambasted this supposed strategic aim of the Obama White House in hysterical terms, [writing](#) that détente with Iran "will deliver disequilibrium, the exact opposite of the effect intended. By negotiating an arms-control agreement, the president has shifted the tectonic plates of the Middle East order." He added: "And for tectonic plates, it takes a move of just inches to level whole cities."

Doran has also argued there are "many more options" than what he calls Obama's "ultimatum" of an "Iranian nuclear program or disaster." He [told](#) Vox in April: "If Ali Khamenei was put before a choice of 'Your nuclear program or absolutely crippling, debilitating economic sanctions,' he would think twice. I think if he were put before a choice

of ‘Your nuclear program or severe military strikes,’ he would think twice.”

So Doran’s answer is either a disastrous war or somehow applying more sanctions on Iran. How he intends to apply these sanctions given the fragile nature of the current sanctions regime and almost certain opposition from the rest of the P5+1 remains a mystery. Perhaps more concessions to Russia? Doran surely also knows that outside of harming ordinary Iranian citizens, sanctions have been a [resolute failure](#) in getting Iran to cease its uranium enrichment or change its fundamental strategic calculations with respect to its nuclear program.

Doran’s doomsday preaching is in fact the *modus operandi* of the deal’s critics. Clifford May, the president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), has [posited](#) that “Mr. Obama is prepared to accept a deal that will be dangerous for America and the West — and, yes, life-threatening for Israel.” He has also [wildly claimed](#) that Iran, were it to develop nuclear weapons, “might provide a bomb to al-Qaeda,” the Sunni organization that is its avowed enemy.

Mark Dubowitz, FDD’s executive director, appears frequently in the media and before Congress lambasting the nuclear talks. He’s called the framework agreement between Iran and the P5+1 a “[seriously flawed](#)” deal and made no secret of his alternative to the tentative agreement: “Critics of Mr. Obama’s efforts are going to get lost in the technical details of this ‘framework’ agreement,” he wrote in a recent *Wall Street Journal* [op-ed](#) co-authored with fellow Iran hawk [Reul Marc Gerecht](#). But “the ultimate issue remains: Are you willing to threaten war to get a better deal, and prepared to preventively strike if Tehran moves toward a bomb?”

The Republican Primaries

As the Republican primaries kick off for the 2016 presidential election, the candidates are doing their utmost to pander to these hawks — and especially to their donors.

Sheldon Adelson, whose massive spending on Republican candidates in the past has steered the foreign policy debate of entire campaigns, stands out in this regard. His annual gathering hosted by the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas, which has become known as the “Adelson primary,” has seen Republican trying to out-hawk each other to win his support.

At times, the race for Adelson’s support has pushed the candidates into politically shaky territory.

Prospective candidate Jeb Bush, for example, [fell out of favor](#) with Adelson for appointing former Secretary of State James Baker — a foreign policy realist disliked by the party’s neoconservative wing — as one of the few non-neocons on his foreign policy team. Soon after, Adelson [exalted](#) former President George W. Bush “for all he’d done for Israel and the Middle East,” prompting the younger Bush to declare that he [looks](#) to his brother for advice on the Middle East — hardly a source of comfort to the non-Adelson wing of the party. Later, the former Florida governor even said he would he [would have authorized](#) the Iraq War even “knowing what we know now.”

“The Las Vegas mogul and Israel hawk,” Joan Walsh of *Salon* [wrote](#) of Adelson, “thus took Bush’s biggest political problem — his brother — and made him an asset.”

Florida Senator [Marco Rubio](#), the aspiring Republican presidential nominee who's been one of the Senate's biggest critics of the Obama administration's diplomacy with Iran and Cuba, has been a major recipient of donations from Adelson and Singer. A recent [report](#) by *Politico* suggests that Rubio "has emerged as the clear front-runner" to win the "Sheldon Adelson primary."

A Failed Strategic Vision

Of course, virtually all of the characters and organizations above were emphatic supporters of the Iraq War. In examining their work, it becomes clear that military force, particularly in the Middle East, is the default tool they advocate for to deal with real or perceived threats.

In the case of the Iran nuclear negotiations, this has proven to be the case even when more long-lasting alternatives exist — like diplomacy — that better secure U.S. interests.

If, as John Lewis Gaddis said, strategy is "the discipline of achieving desired ends through the most efficient use of available means," and the desired end of this militaristic faction is to maximize U.S. national security, their recommended strategies have clearly been abysmal failures.

The Iraq War they so fiercely championed, for instance, was a debacle that greatly weakened the American position in the Middle East at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. Ironically, that war was in large measure responsible for strengthening Iran's hand in the region — the very thing these hawks say a new war is necessary to address.

A nuclear deal with Iran presents the opportunity to avoid another catastrophic war in the Middle East and potentially opens the door to working with Iran on critical areas of mutual interest, such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yet by so vigorously denouncing the Obama White House's negotiations with Iran, these armchair warriors are pushing for a war that wouldn't only be terrible for the region and the people who live there. It would harvest more lives and limbs from American soldiers, waste trillions more taxpayer dollars, and undoubtedly erode U.S. standing in the world even further.

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A Neocon Admits the Plan to Bomb Iran

[Robert Parry, Consortium News March 16, 2015](#): The neocon *Washington Post*, which wants to kill the talks aimed at constraining Iran's nuclear program, allowed a contrary opinion of sorts onto its pages – a neocon who also wants to collapse the talks but is honest enough to say that the follow-up will be a U.S. war on Iran, reports Robert Parry.

Not exactly known for truthfulness, U.S. neocons have been trying to reassure the American people that sinking a negotiated deal with Iran to limit its nuclear program would be a painless proposition, but at least one prominent neocon, Joshua Muravchik, acknowledges

that the alternative will be war – and he likes the idea.

On Sunday, the neocon Washington Post allowed Muravchik to use its opinion section to advocate for an aggressive war against Iran – essentially a perpetual U.S. bombing campaign against the country – despite the fact that aggressive war is a violation of international law, condemned by the post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunal as “the supreme international crime.”



Given that the Post is very restrictive in the op-ed pieces that it prints, it is revealing that advocacy for an unprovoked bombing campaign against Iran is considered within the realm of acceptable opinion. But the truth is that the only difference between Muravchik’s view and the *Post*’s own editorial stance is that Muravchik lays out the almost certain consequences of sabotaging a diplomatic solution.

In his [article](#) headlined “War is the only way to stop Iran” in print editions and “War with Iran is probably our best option” online, Muravchik lets the bloody-thirsty neocon cat out of the bag as he agrees with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s hysterical view of Iran but recognizes that killing international negotiations on limiting Iran’s nuclear program would leave open only one realistic option:

“What if force is the only way to block Iran from gaining nuclear weapons? That, in fact, is probably the reality. ... Sanctions may have induced Iran to enter negotiations, but they have not persuaded it to abandon its quest for nuclear weapons. Nor would the stiffer sanctions that Netanyahu advocates bring a different result. ...

“Does this mean that our only option is war? Yes, although an air campaign targeting Iran’s nuclear infrastructure would entail less need for boots on the ground than the war Obama is waging against the Islamic State, which poses far smaller a threat than Iran does. ... Wouldn’t destroying much of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure merely delay its progress? Perhaps, but we can strike as often as necessary.”

Typical of the neocons, Muravchik foresees no problem with his endless bombing war against Iran, including the possibility that Iran, which Western intelligence agencies agree is *not* working on a bomb, might reverse its course if it faced repeated bombing assaults from the United States.

This neocon-advocated violation of international law also might further undermine hopes of curbing violence in the Middle East and establishing some form of meaningful order there and elsewhere. This neocon view that America can do whatever it wants to whomever it wants might actually push the rest of the world into a coalition against U.S. bullying that could provoke an existential escalation of violence with nuclear weapons coming into play.

Never Seeing Reality

Of course, neocons never foresee problems as they draw up these war plans at their think tanks and discuss them on their op-ed pages. Muravchik, by the way, is a fellow at the neocon-dominated School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins and the Washington Post’s editorial page is run by neocons Fred Hiatt and Jackson Diehl.

But, as U.S. officialdom and the American people should have learned from the Iraq War,

neocon schemes often don't play out quite as well in the real world – not that the neocons seem to care about the hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis or the nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers who died fighting in the neocons' Iraq debacle.

For the neocons, their true guiding star is to enlist the U.S. military as the enforcers of Netanyahu's strategic vision. If Netanyahu says that Iran – not al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – is the more serious threat then the neocons line up behind that agenda, which also happens to dovetail with the interests of Israel's new ally, Saudi Arabia.

So, Americans hear lots of scary stories about Iran “gobbling up” its neighbors – as Netanyahu described in his lecture to a joint session of the U.S. Congress this month – even though Iran has not invaded any country for centuries and, indeed, was the target of a Saudi-backed invasion by Iraq in 1980.

Not only did Netanyahu's wildly exaggerate the danger from Iran but he ignored the fact that Iran's involvement in Iraq and Syria has come at the invitation of those governments to help fight the terrorists of al-Qaeda's Nusra Front and the Islamic State. [See Consortiumnews.com's “[Congress Cheers Netanyahu's Hatred of Iran.](#)”]

In other words, Iran is on the same side of those conflicts against Sunni terrorists as the United States is. But what we're seeing now from Israel and the neocons is a determined effort to shift U.S. focus away from combating Sunni terrorists — some backed by Saudi Arabia — and toward essentially taking their side against Iran, Iraq and Syria.

That's why the neocons are downplaying the atrocities of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – or for that matter the chopping off of heads by Israel's Saudi friends – while hyping every complaint they can about Iran. [See Consortiumnews.com's “[The Secret Saudi Ties to Terrorism.](#)”]

Muravchik favors this reversal of priorities and doesn't seem to care that a U.S. bombing campaign against Iran would have a destructive impact on Iran's ability to blunt the advances of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda. The neocons also have been hot for bombing Syria's military, which along with Iran represents the greatest bulwark against the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.

The neocons and Netanyahu seem quite complacent about the prospect of the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front hoisting their black flags over Damascus or even Baghdad. Yet, such a move would almost surely force the U.S. president – whether Barack Obama or his successor – to return to a ground war in the Middle East at enormous cost to the American people.

The obvious alternative to this truly frightening scenario is to complete the international negotiations requiring Iran to accept intrusive inspections to ensure that its nuclear program remains peaceful – and then work with Iran on areas of mutual interests, such as rolling back the advances of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front in Syria.

This more rational approach holds out the prospect of achieving some stability in Iraq and – if accompanied by realistic negotiations between Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and his political opponents – reducing the bloodletting in Syria if not ending it.

That pragmatic solution could well be the best result both for the people of the region and for U.S. national interests. But none of that would please Netanyahu and the neocons.

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](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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