



Washington War Party Creates Another Organization to Promote Endless Wars

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After 20 years of U.S. nation-building in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden ordered a withdrawal. Most Americans backed his decision to stop at least one endless war, but the bipartisan War Party in Washington is horrified. It believes that Americans should be deployed wherever and whenever people are killing one another around the world.

Elliott Abrams last week penned an op-ed celebrating creation of the Vandenberg Coalition, "a new network committed to advancing a strong and proud American foreign policy." Abrams is a noted Neoconservative who famously participated in the Iran-Contra scandal and bizarrely served Donald Trump after claiming to be a Never-Trumper.

The Neocons already dominate Washington – Republican Party, think tanks, and media, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, which published Abrams' piece. Neocon influence also reaches well into the Democratic Party. What was Hillary Clinton other than a Neocon in liberal drag? Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez appears to be as committed to promiscuous intervention as any Republican. Samantha Power famously expressed irritation that popular anger over the Iraq disaster – imagine that! – prevented war-happy policymakers like her from launching bloody new foreign crusades. So many countries to bomb, so little time!

But in the Neocons' view even this dominance isn't nearly enough.

When even one noninterventionist is on the loose in Washington, they believe they must act decisively. More important, Donald Trump is still active, enjoying the loyalty of the seriously deranged GOP base. He was rarely consistent or coherent – his hawkish staffers easily manipulated him to stay in, and often even escalate, the conflicts that he inherited. However, unlike the Neocons he really didn't like war. The last president who did not embark on at least one new misadventure and needlessly sacrifice American lives was Jimmy Carter. Trump's surprisingly peaceful policy left the war lobby confused, distraught, and angry, even though Trump routinely hired its members, such as Abrams. Hence the Neocons' perceived need for yet another organization to celebrate Mars, the ancient god of war, and present him as America's foreign policy ideal.

Members of the War Party disagreed about Trump, but they "were never divided over the importance of American global leadership, and today we reassert that unity in advancing US national interests," observed Abrams. He cited six organizing principles.

First, wrote Abrams, is the belief that "American security depends on leadership." There is no bromide more frequently expressed by Washington solons than the need for "leadership." Republican politicians especially use the word like a magical incantation. The most vacuous political hacks appear on TV bleating "leadership, leadership" as a substitute for having views worth leading on.

The ultimate question is leadership to do what? The US led in Iraq. The result – destruction of a country, sectarian war, mass civilian casualties, creation of multiple insurgent/terrorist groups, slaughter of minority religious communities, empowerment of Iran – was a humanitarian and strategic disaster. The US led for two decades in Afghanistan, for no good reason attempting to create a strong central government and Western-style democracy where none had previously existed. The US claimed to lead in Yemen, promising to limit civilian casualties while providing the self-aggrandizing Saudi royals with everything necessary to wreak death and destruction upon the Yemeni people.

The US spent decades leading against Iran. Helping to overthrow a democratically elected government. Supporting a brutal dictator. Aiding a neighboring dictatorship's aggressive war against Tehran that killed a million-plus people. Shooting down an Iranian airliner while guarding oil sold to finance aggression against Tehran. Threatening war constantly and imposing sanctions always, triggering even more disruptive, destabilizing, and dangerous behavior by Iran.

We can't afford more such "leadership."

Today the Neocons and rest of the War Party define leadership as defending rich allies, rebuilding failed states, creating enemies faster than they can be killed, starving peoples to hurt their leaders, supporting aggressive war in the name of humanity, and intervening everywhere against everyone for anything. No wonder even America's friends have grown leery of its "leadership."

Washington now even acts against longtime allies. Those which refuse to accept US leadership and enforce America's will are punished as enemies. To start, every sanction is secondary as the War Lobby abuses America's financial dominance to conscript others in Washington's endless economic crusades. Worse, supposed friends become official targets.

For instance, Washington punished Germany for building a natural gas pipeline to Russia because, the US said, *doing so is not in Berlin's interest*. The clueless Germans must be saved from themselves, sovereignty be damned! Alas, many Germans suspect that Washington's feigned solicitude is primarily a ploy to force Europe to purchase more American natural gas. Equally convenient, this time for the profits of U.S. merchants of death, is the impact of sanctions on foreign governments which purchase Russian arms. Hence global "leadership" at its most cynical.

Second, Abrams wrote, "a strong America is a safe America. The US must have a well-funded military and security infrastructure to protect its people and deter aggression." True, but this has very little to do with US foreign policy or military force structure today. The US is relatively invulnerable – vast oceans east and west, pacific neighbors north and south, world's largest domestic economy, and stable constitutional order, despite four years of quasi-public lunacy with a narcissistic child ensconced in the Oval Office.

The threat of nuclear-tipped missiles is real but can be deterred. Missile defense is a worthy effort, though the technological limitations are serious. Terrorism remains a concern but never was an existential threat. Indeed, that danger pales compared to the catastrophic expense of two decades of nonstop war in the name of counterterrorism. Worse, US policy spawned most of the worst movements targeting America. Terrorism is a reflection not of America's goodness but instead of Washington's meanness – US aggression and intervention abroad, including routine support for governments that oppress others.

No country poses a serious conventional threat to America. NATO is welfare for European states which can't be bothered to use their own resources, collectively 11 times the economic power and four times the population, to defend against Russia. Indeed, Moscow couldn't easily digest Georgia and Ukraine, if it invaded them, let alone the European continent. Militarily China threatens US influence in East Asia, not the homeland, a huge difference. Even the worst Neocon fantasies don't project Chinese invasion fleets advancing on Los Angeles and Seattle. In essence, Washington fears losing its ability to coerce China nearly 8000 miles away, not defend America from Chinese aggression. The challenge posed by Beijing is principally other than military.

Point three, according to Abrams, is support for "strategic cooperation." In his view "Robust alliances among sovereign nations and the strategic use of multilateral institutions advance American security." This can be true but depends on the alliance and its terms. The potential limitation of alliances was one of Trump's genuine insights.

Alliances should be a means to an end, created to advance American security. That can mean temporarily shielding important countries/regions unable to defend themselves from a wannabe hegemon – think Cold War protection of war-ravaged Europe, Japan, and South Korea. In particular, the US did not want Eurasia dominated by any one power, especially an adversary of America.

However, this threat long ago vanished. Even Tom Clancy would have trouble concocting a serious plot in which Russia conquers the world. Nor is China going to do so. Indeed, if Japan devoted as much effort to defense as does America, Tokyo could easily deter Beijing, rather than call on Washington to do the job. South Korea is vastly stronger than North Korea. Other threatened states also could do far more on their own behalf.

Of course, the right kind of cooperation with allies could still promote collective ends. For instance, Trump proved his utter ineptness by simultaneously declaring economic war on Europe and China, bungling both offensives. This was akin to the old German military policy of staging two-front wars, which failed twice. It would have made more sense for Washington to have worked with Europe to pressure China to improve the latter's commercial practices and regulations.

However, cooperating with Europe on trade would not require subsidizing their defense. Americans proved to be the worst suckers, convincing themselves that "leadership" requires Washington to do for others what they should be doing for themselves, such as providing for their defense. Countries circling the globe are only too happy to encourage this persistent delusion, so beloved of egotistical US policymakers.

Fourth, Abrams backed "free and fair trade." Free trade is good, but "fair trade" usually is a protectionist scam. While there are evident foreign abuses, such as intellectual property theft,

most businesses believe every competitor is engaging in "unfair" practices and should be stopped by Washington. For the domestic steel industry every foreign sale in the US is obvious economic aggression and should be barred.

Yet the denizens of Washington do America a disservice acting as if the US is an innocent virgin being economically gang-raped by a malicious world. American trade negotiators always work to protect politically powerful domestic industries; Trump renegotiated past pacts to *make them worse* by shielding additional domestic interests from competition and reducing commerce. The US is one of the chief offenders against free trade.

For his fifth point, Abrams declared: "we support a proud US foreign policy that champions American values without apology." That's a crowd-pleaser but what does it mean? It isn't enough to articulate American values. It is vital to *practice* them. At which the US does a terrible job.

Even today Washington routinely supports tyranny abroad: Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates are just four execrable regimes that America backs, almost unreservedly. By Freedom House's ranking Riyadh is markedly worse even than Iran. And there are plenty more countries where America goes easy for political purposes – Thailand, Vietnam, and Turkey seem to escape the hysterical charges and manifold demands for sanctions that arise when the regimes are less friendly, such as Venezuela, Russia, Iran, and Syria.

Moreover, the US is often callous and cruel. For instance, the now pervasive use of sanctions appears to be mostly a continuing attempt to signal virtue than achieve anything practical. Officials like former Amb. Jim Jeffrey – who admitted misleading Trump to keep Americans entangled in the Syrian imbroglio – appear to get cruel pleasure from immiserating an entire population to turn it into a geopolitical "quagmire" for other states. Never mind the millions of innocent people who suffer along the way. So far most sanctions have failed to achieve their purported policy ends.

Indeed, the Trump administration's multiple "maximum pressure" crusades were a stunning debacle. Targeting individual malefactors proved emotionally satisfying but unfortunately had no practical impact. Who expected China's Xi Jinping to humbly embrace democracy because party apparatchiks no longer could visit America? Thus, Washington often used tougher, broader measures to starve entire populations – such as Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, and Syria – in an attempt to either change governments or government policies. Alas, the idea that, say, Bashar al-Assad, who just survived a decade of civil war, would abandon power lest his people suffer further was a bizarre fantasy even for the most thoughtless Washington apparatchik.

Particularly notable was Iran's response to Washington's demands: it enhanced nuclear enrichment, interfered with Gulf shipping, destroyed Saudi oil facilities, intervened in regional conflicts, and encouraged proxy forces to bombard U.S. bases and embassy in Iraq. Indeed, the ever pompous, swaggering Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was reduced to whining about the potential necessity of closing America's embassy – after claiming that deterrence had been restored against Tehran. He did a fine if inadvertent job of undermining American credibility worldwide. The only possible foreign conclusion was that Trump's sanctions policy was being implemented by fools, idiots, or both.

And then there are America's many wars. In Yemen even the State Department warned that top US officials risked being charged as accomplices to war crimes by aiding the vile Saudi dictatorship's aggressive war. Indeed, Yemeni civilians call it the Saudi-American War. In Libya the Obama administration lied about humanitarian threats to win United Nations Security Council approval for what became a regime change operation on the cheap. Muammar Khadafy was a standard-issue thug but committed no civilian massacres and his widely cited threats were directed against armed opponents, not civilians. The result of US intervention was an added decade of civil war, including another battleground for the Islamic State. Heckuva' job!

Most horrific was Iraq. Set aside the thousands of dead and tens of thousands of wounded Americans, victims of lies and manipulated "intelligence." Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis – estimates begin at about 200,000 and range well above a million – were killed. Millions were displaced. Religious minorities were targeted, murdered, kidnapped, enslaved, raped, and driven from their homes. Al-Qaeda in Iraq was spawned, mutating into ISIS. The country was ravaged. Iranian influence metastasized. Yeah, mission accomplished! So much for those vaunted "American values" of which Abrams is so proud.

Finally, he wrote, "foreign policy should be responsive to all Americans – not only those in Washington or with the clout to hire lobbyists." That sounds great. Of course, taken seriously, the War Party would be among the greatest losers. Consider Afghanistan. The American people want to end two decades of nation-building. It is capital solons who are having a collective meltdown, claiming that Americans will soon be battling al-Qaeda and ISIS across America if we stop doing such a great job at creating paradise in Central Asia.

Indeed, average folks around the country always tend to be least enthusiastic about murderous military misadventures abroad. One of the reasons Trump defeated Hillary Clinton was his criticism of years of endless war. Blue collar Democrats, in particular, were aware that she was the queen of war. Anyone who watched her cackle with glee in discussing Khadafy's death should be profoundly happy that such a twisted soul never entered the White House.

There's also a caution, however. In an apparent bow to Joe Biden's "foreign policy for the middle class," Abrams worried about "the effect of trade deals on employment." This, however, is a dangerous protectionist fallacy. Expanded trade yields greater prosperity, increased growth, and ultimately more jobs. However, the latter tend to be invisible politically, while everyone knows if a specific factory shuts, complaining about "cheap imports." The cost of "saving" a single job through protectionism typically runs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, far more than such jobs pay their workers.

Moreover, imports fuel growth elsewhere: roughly 40 percent are for intermediate use, necessary to produce other goods. This is evident in the steel industry. The effort by Trump, an unbounded economic ignoramus, to "save" some steel jobs ravaged export industries – which faced increased prices at home and higher import barriers abroad. Far more jobs were lost than gained, yet Biden now appears ready to make these restrictions permanent. *Americans without lobbyists will be the greatest losers* from continued assaults on free trade.

No one can disagree with Abrams' objective of acting to "strengthen our nation and protect Americans." But that isn't what today's bipartisan policy of promiscuous intervention does. The war lobby has just deployed yet another organization to promote death and destruction around the globe. The country desperately needs an equally influential peace lobby.

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