



Hawks Smear War Opponents Again

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Advocates of an aggressive U.S. foreign policy are again smearing their antiwar opponents. In his [latest article on Substack](#), iconoclastic journalist Glenn Greenwald notes that he "cannot count the number of times" that he has "been accused of being a Kremlin agent or asset, not by random social media trolls but by prominent Democratic Party and liberal media and political figures for expressing those views." Greenwald emphasized that he is hardly alone in receiving such treatment. "That is now, by far, the favorite attack against anyone who believes that Ukrainian borders are not important enough to US interests to involve the US in a war." He proceeds to document a number of ugly smears impugning the loyalty of Fox News host Tucker Carlson and others who dare question the wisdom (or sanity) of adopting a dangerous, hardline policy toward Russia.

From personal experience, I can confirm Greenwald's observation. In [an article on the Atlantic Council's blog](#), responding to an earlier article of mine in *National Interest Online*, German analyst Andreas Umland embodied that tactic. After asserting that "an ideologically diverse range of Western sources" have "echoed many of Moscow's more outlandish claims," Umland "peppered his op-ed with other "Russian tool" innuendoes and singled me out for special criticism. Carpenter's "talking points would be instantly recognizable to Russian TV viewers, who have encountered similar disinformation on a virtually daily basis for the past seven years. One can only guess at Carpenter's motives."

Umland amplified his guilt-by-innuendo campaign in a subsequent, much more detailed [article in Eurasia Review](#). The following captures his argument: "Here comes a senior American commentator working at a leading Washington think-tank, publishing in one of the most influential US political magazines, and repeating exactly those talking points that the Kremlin has been spreading to justify its thinly veiled hybrid war against Ukraine for seven years now. This not enough, Carpenter uses the Kremlin's favorite narratives to unapologetically call for an end of US support for Ukraine. What more could Moscow hope for?" The ghost of Sen. Joseph McCarthy likely is beaming at the audacity of that passage

As Greenwald points out, several characteristics provide the cohesion for pro-war types, both neocons and hawkish liberals. "Two of the most toxic of these have been on full display over the last month. The first is that they are always – in every case – in favor of any opportunities for the U.S. to involve itself in a new war. You wind up a neocon, and they start inventing excuses for why the US must either bomb and invade other countries or enter a new proxy war to arm and fund other countries to do so for it. It is, therefore, unnecessary to point out that they are all not just in favor of US involvement in a potential war between Russia and Ukraine but fanatical and giddy about it."

The pro-war faction's invocation of Vladimir Putin's alleged threat to the entire international order, especially by seeking to "evict the United States from Europe," confirms Greenwald's conclusions. Chronic war advocate Max Boot asserts that Putin's goal is nothing less than the re-establishment of the Soviet empire. Such threat inflation throughout the American foreign policy community and news media is intensifying. For hawks willing to have America risk a nuclear war with Russia, their portrayal of the current NATO-Russia confrontation resembles the culminating portions of *Lord of Rings*, in which brave defenders of freedom must risk all to bring down the supremely evil Sauron.

The other element of cohesion for pro-war lobbyists, Greenwald emphasizes, is the way neocons and their liberal hawkish allies "smear anyone who opposes their plots to involve the US in new wars as traitors, on the side of whichever Bad Leader they want (others) to fight."

It is not a new phenomenon. Pro-war types routinely excoriated opponents of the Vietnam War as being advocates of appeasement at best and outright communist sympathizers at worst. That pattern appeared again in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks. When Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) voted against the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (the only member of the House to do so), numerous conservative publications vilified her. John Fund's op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* was typical of the treatment. "One wishes Ms. Lee were just a clueless liberal," Fund stated, "but her history leads me to conclude that she is the kind of 'San Francisco Democrat' that former United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick criticized in 1984: someone who 'always blames America first.'" He harped on the point of Lee's alleged special aversion to America's role in the world: "America has been attacked, and while pacifism has an honorable tradition in this country, Ms. Lee seems to use it as a cloak for her belief that when it comes to the use of American power, her country can never do right."

That same ugly tactic was pervasive during the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. David Frum's infamous article in *National Review*, "Unpatriotic Conservatives," was the most flagrant example, but there were many others. Frum is back to his usual tactics, impugning the loyalty of individuals who criticize the attempt to stampede America into a military confrontation with Russia. In a January 23 tweet, he thundered: "You're going to hear a lot of lying about Putin's War from Putin apologists on the [Tucker] Carlson right and the [Glenn] Greenwald left. Don't let them get away with it. Putin is plotting this conflict, only Putin, and any excuse for Putin is an excuse for a war wanted by nobody in the West."

Policy toward Russia seems to be an especially prominent lightning rod in bringing out the worse features of the vocal neo-McCarthyites. Moreover, that pattern emerged long before the

concerted effort to promote allegations about supposed collusion between Donald Trump and the Russian government. People who dared oppose a belligerent response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, or who made the case that Washington's meddling to help demonstrators unseat Ukraine's pro-Russia president provoked the annexation, found themselves targets of vitriol from a de facto alliance of neocons and liberal hawks.

Indeed, some of the nastiest allegations from both camps were directed against individuals who not only had nothing to do with Donald Trump's presidential bid but were outright critics of Trump. Princeton University Professor Stephen F. Cohen, a longtime distinguished scholar of the Soviet Union and its successor states, was a prominent early target. Critics impugned Cohen's motives and sullied his reputation long before the 2016 election, because he advocated a less confrontational policy toward Russia. Such epithets as "Putin's American apologist" and "Putin's pal" were among the routine labels they applied to Cohen.

People who argued that NATO's expansion eastward to Russia's border had needlessly provoked Moscow, or that Russia's actions in Ukraine were more defensive than offensive, received the same treatment. Epithets such as "Putin's apologists," "stooges," "Russian trolls," "patsies," and "useful idiots" laced such denunciations. Matters have not improved since then. A Yahoo "news" story referred to Tucker Carlson as a "Russian stooge" just days ago. Writing in *Slate*, William Saletan labeled Carlson "America's most watched Kremlin propagandist." The leftist *Media Matters* branded him a "Putin apologist."

The purpose of such slimy tactics is readily apparent: intimidation of war opponents and the suppression of debate about US foreign policies. Too often, hawks have succeeded in achieving their objective, and the United States has blundered into unnecessary wars that caused widespread havoc in and around the targeted countries. The conflicts in Vietnam and Iraq are the most illustrative examples, but unfortunate outcomes on a smaller scale also occurred in places such as the Balkans, Libya, and Syria (in part because of a stifling of meaningful debate about those dubious policies.) The potential for a disastrous outcome of a confrontation between the United States and Russia is far greater. We must not let the David Frums of the world prevail this time.

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