

The War for the President's Mind

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The Woodward book is supposed to be a blow against the Trump administration for supposedly depicting an administration in “chaos,” but it actually manages to show the foreign policy aspect of Trump’s White House in its best light, albeit unintentionally. Woodward, being the swamp-creature that he is, uncritically cites administration officials who denounce Trump’s Singapore peace initiative with North Korea as prima facie evidence that the man is unhinged. This is the conventional wisdom inside the Washington Beltway: out in the real world, however, Trump’s view is evidence of his sanity. While the political class is worried that declaring the Korean war over and done with will pull the plug on the US military occupation of South Korea – a possibility Woodward conjures as a kind of Armageddon — normal Americans are hoping to see the troops come home after nearly 70 years!

Despite dire predictions by hysterics on both sides of the political spectrum, Trump hasn’t started any new wars and seems determined to dial down those already in progress. The most visible conflict now seems to be the war for the President’s mind, which pits the most consistent advocate of promiscuous intervention, Sen. Lindsey Graham, against Trump’s most recent (and surprising) ally, Sen. Rand Paul. These two are competing for the President’s ear, and the winner looks to be:

“[I]f Graham has tried to wield his influence with Trump to pull the trigger on more foreign interventions, Paul has wished to influence Trump in the polar-opposite direction. Unfortunately for the hawkish Graham, it appears at least some of Paul’s ideas have rubbed off on the president.”

It’s a tug of war, and Lindsey is losing:

“In defending his approach to Russian President Vladimir Putin and other repressive leaders, Trump has in recent months expressed to those close to him a sympathy for Paul’s non-intervention streak, stressing how American politicians of both parties want to recklessly start ‘World War III,’ if only to stick it to Putin or Assad.

“Trump has then, in the same breath, praised more dovish Republicans such as ‘Rand, [who] won’t let that happen,’ and will help keep America from slipping into another quagmire or major war, according to a source familiar with Trump’s private comments.”

As I've said in this space before, Rand Paul has really grown into his role as the antiwar conscience of the Senate. Yesterday he was an over-ambitious (and overly cautious) rookie: today he's a statesman and a real factor in determining the course of US foreign policy. This sea change shows not only high intelligence, but also displays real courage – because the libertarian base, insofar as the organized libertarian movement is concerned, is largely clueless when it comes to what attitude to take toward Trump.

The Kochtopus – i.e. the constellation of ostensibly libertarian organizations and individuals funded by Charles and David Koch – has gone full-tilt anti-Trump: get a load of the Cato Institute's cyber-"expert" Julian Sanchez echoing the Russia-gate hoaxsters and rationalizing the FBI-CIA-NSA surveillance of the Trump campaign.

Yes, folks, it's "Libertarians for the CIA" – a truly exotic ideological innovation found only in the Washington Beltway. Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

Unsurprisingly, the vehemently anti-Trump *Reason* crowd – yet another tentacle of the Kochtopus – has largely stopped touting Rand and instead started pushing the downright sinister Bill Weld, who openly endorsed Hillary Clinton in the final days of the 2016 campaign.

In marked contrast to this abject Beltway groupthink, Col. Douglas Macgregor, whose book, *Breaking the Phalanx*, advocated comprehensive reform of the Pentagon, has made a case similar to Sen. Paul's – and mine – that the Trump era presents anti-interventionists with a unique opportunity. Citing Singapore and Helsinki, he makes his pitch before a conference put on by the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity:

Like me, Col. Macgregor sees the Deep State – the permanent national security bureaucracy, which has a material interest in maintaining our globalist foreign policy – and not the President as the main obstacle to turning the massive ship of state around. Indeed, in this internal fight, Trump is our ally. The "Resistance" inside the government is fighting him tooth and nail – but what else did we expect with a President who is challenging the Empire on such a fundamental level?

There are naturally going to be contradictions, rough patches, and some backwards motion on the road to ridding ourselves of this troublesome Empire and getting our old republic back. Indeed, this administration could very easily veer out of the President's control and involve us in a major war. The course of human history is necessarily bumpy, and we're bound to go off course. And yet the essential fact of the matter is that *we've already won* because the *idea* of ditching our globalist foreign policy triumphed on Election Day, 2016. All that remains is for the logic of this decisive ideological victory to play out in the material world.

The Deep State, lurking in the background and directing the campaign to oust Trump, knows this perfectly well, which is why they launched their regime-change campaign to begin with. They fear and loathe a President who wants out of Korea, out of the new cold war with Russia, and out of the regime change business because he represents a threat to their very existence. It's as simple as that.

Yes, we absolutely must point out the contradictions in Trump's foreign policy, and they are legion: Yemen being one but not even the most egregious, which is surely Syria. And yet we know for a fact that the President is not in charge of his own foreign policy: the "two-track"

stance on Russia is just one example in which the schizoid condition this administration finds itself.

Writing about all this in a way that is helpful to readers is a lot more complicated than appears on the surface. The idea is to penetrate beyond the surface – to get *behind the headlines*, which is why I titled this column the way I did. To do that requires a lot more than partisan posturing, and ideological virtue-signaling: constant carping is not the same thing as rational analysis.

On the other hand, the obverse – constant cheerleading – is just as bad. Yet it's important to make a distinction between cheerleading and giving credit where it's due. As an example of the former, take Sean Hannity on the subject of Trump: come hell or high water, he's always defending the administration. On the other hand, another Fox News personality, Tucker Carlson, is a prime example of the latter: although he's broadly sympathetic to the President, particularly when it comes to foreign policy, Tucker's principled defense of Trump is bereft of partisan tribalism – and he doesn't hesitate to speak up when he disagrees with the White House party line.

This is, in part, why I admire Carlson: here is someone who was a typical somewhat knee-jerkish conservative ideologue who has become a thoughtful critic of all varieties of groupthink, whether right or left (or ostensibly libertarian). Hopefully I replicate the same resistance to the herd instinct in this space: not contrarianism for the sake of contrarianism, but a merciless devotion to accuracy that doesn't mind disturbing the sensibilities and prejudices of one's own tribe.