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President Trump? Who's Who in Trump's Foreign Policy Inner Circle? US War Machine Rolls On

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There's little doubt that, as president, Hillary Clinton will enact the same sorts of disastrous and criminal policies that her predecessors of both parties have pursued. Donald Trump, on the other hand, is being lauded by many as a much needed change in terms of US foreign policy, someone whose ideas and actions will be guided by a very different understanding of the world.

With one breath Trump talks about wanting to "get along with Russia," and with another proclaims the need to "punish China" for what he describes as currency manipulation and aggression in the South China Sea. The difficulty in ascertaining just what sort of foreign policy Trump would pursue has led many international observers to wonder aloud whether a Trump presidency might not be the best thing for world peace.



Indeed, when it comes to the Middle East and issues as complex as international terrorism, Syria, and Israel-Palestine, there has been speculation that Trump might in fact be something of a non-interventionist, someone who would focus on US domestic problems and rein in US aggression around the world.

But there is no reason to wonder anymore as Trump recently revealed to the Washington Post some of his core advisers on foreign policy. And, to put it bluntly, a Trump presidency means little more than a continuation of US aggression, criminality, and imperialism.

Who's Who in Trump's Foreign Policy Inner Circle?

If, as the old adage goes, you are known by the company you keep, then we already know what to expect from a Trump presidency. While The Donald did not provide a complete list of his advisers, just the small sampling should give pause to anyone who has become enamored of the idea that Trump would tone down US foreign policy.

First up for scrutiny is Walid Phares, perhaps the most well known of Trump's foreign policy

team. Phares is a regular commentator on FOX News where he generally espouses more or less the same policies as any typical Washington neoconservative. Indeed, his pedigree and history place him squarely in the aggressive neocon camp, including as one of the main advisers (along with notable neocons Robert Kagan, Eliot Cohen, Eric Edelman, et al) to Mitt Romney in his failed 2012 presidential campaign.

Phares spent a decade as a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), a well known neoconservative think tank long since understood as pro-Israel, and widely regarded as part of the influential Israel Lobby. In fact, FDD president and founder Clifford May described the group's mission as being "to enhance Israel's image in North America and the public's understanding of issues affecting Israeli-Arab relations."

To that end, Phares has long-standing ties, both professionally and ideologically, with Israel and the hardliner policies of Tel Aviv. As Professor As`ad AbuKhalil of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley wrote in 2011:

> Phares' first career began early in the Lebanese civil war of the 1975-1990 when he allied himself with the right-wing militias, armed and financed by Israel… After Genral [sic] Michel Auon assumed the presidency of Lebanon in 1988, Phares joined the right-wing coalition known as the Lebanese Front, which consisted of various sectarian groupings and militia [sic]. The Front backed Gen. Auon in his struggles against the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad and the Muslims of Lebanon. Phares's role was not small, according to Beirut newspaper accounts.. He served as vice chair of another front's political leadership committee, headed by a man named Etienne Saqr, whose Guardians of Cedar militia voiced the slogan "Kill a Palestinian and you shall enter Heaven."… The Front was also backed by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, a bitter foe of the Syrians.

Indeed, as respected foreign policy analyst Jim Lobe noted, Phares is "controversial for his past ties to the militant Phalange movement in Lebanon." For the uninitiated, the Phalange movement is responsible for brutal repression of Palestinians and has been deeply connected to the Israeli state going back to the founding of Israel in 1948. As the New York Times wrote in July 1983 in the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, "The Maronite Christians of Lebanon and their Phalangist Party became Israel's key allies during the war in Lebanon that began when Israeli troops invaded Lebanon in June 1982… the Phalangist militias [showed] ruthlessness in massacring hundreds of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut last September."

And this is the world from which the FOX News "expert" and key foreign policy advisor to Trump emerges. So while Mr. Trump touts his "fairness" and not wanting to "take sides" in the Israel-Palestine conflict, he'll have a key belligerent and party to war crimes against Palestinians whispering in his ear. Not exactly the sort of revelation that engenders much hope. Also interesting to note is the decades old hatred of the Assad family in Syria that Phares has evinced. Perhaps this explains, at least in part, why Trump has publicly called for a ground invasion of Syria and Iraq with up to 30,000 US troops; so much for non-interventionism.

Chairing Trump's foreign policy team is Republican Senator Jeff Sessions, a far right conservative whose actual positions on the key issues of war and peace demonstrate unmitigated imperialistic views. He voted YES to enlarging NATO to include Eastern Europe (along with his colleague Hillary Clinton), which certainly calls into question the very

notion that Trump has any real intention to move the US away from NATO. Additionally, in perhaps the most important political vote in the last few decades, Sessions was unabashedly in favor of the Iraq War. He proclaimed on the floor of the US Senate at the time:

> Our motive is good, our goals positive and realistic, and our leaders honest, careful, principled and have the courage to act on those beliefs... I know the vision that President Bush has to protect his people and improve the world... The American people did not sacrifice to create the greatest military in history to allow China, Russia or even France to have a veto over its use. It is no wonder that these nations would like, through the mechanism of the United Nations, to seize control over our military and to use it as they will.

Aside from being disastrously wrong on Iraq (along with Hillary Clinton), Sessions also voted YES on designating Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization as part of the National Defense Authorization Act in 2007. He steadfastly supported continued occupation of Iraq long into 2008, when many others had already conceded the war as a disaster and were ready to leave. And, lest anyone think Sessions merely voted this way out of party loyalty during the Bush administration, it should be noted that he voted YES on the bombing of Kosovo under Bill Clinton, yet another instance where he and Hillary were in agreement. Other examples abound of Trump's foreign policy Chair's serial warmongering.

Trump also named Keith Kellogg, a former Army lieutenant general, as one of his key advisers. Mr. Kellogg, after having left the Army, has served in executive positions in a number of military contracting firms, including CACI International at the time its employees took part in torture programs at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Having overseen a company directly involved in torturing prisoners of the US military, it should come as no surprise then that Kellogg is a principal foreign policy adviser to Trump who on numerous occasions has promised that under his watch, the US would bring back "a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding."



Kellogg has deep ties to various sections of the military-industrial complex, both from his time as principal adviser to the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the disastrous Bush administration (along with other high ranking posts in the Pentagon), and from his myriad positions with private contractors and mercenary organizations; not exactly an anti-establishment outsider.

Then there's Joe Schmitz – or as Trump referred to him, "the honorable Joe Schmitz" – who was the inspector general at the Defense Department during the Bush administration. Under his watch the US committed countless war crimes for which no one was ever prosecuted. In fact, it was his refusal to prosecute military criminality, including lying to Congress and protecting criminals highly placed in the military bureaucracy, that led to his being investigated by the US Congress.

Rather than face any scrutiny, Schmitz simply resigned his position and immediately took an executive position with the infamous Blackwater USA (mercenary company that has committed war crimes all over the globe) where he served as chief operation officer and general counsel. Again, one has to wonder about a Trump presidency in which wanton criminality is not only stated publicly by the candidate, but is in fact precisely the track record of his foreign policy team.

Finally there are Carter Page and George Papadopoulos, both connected to the "energy-industrial complex," that is, Big Oil and all the myriad institutions devoted to it.

Page is the founder and managing partner of Global Energy Capital, a private equity firm that invests in big energy projects and sits at the intersection of Wall Street and Big Oil. Page is a veteran of Wall Street big shots Merrill Lynch where he served as Chief Operating Officer of the Energy and Power Group. Merrill Lynch is of course the corporate and investment banking division of Bank of America, one of the largest financial institutions in the world. In effect then, Carter Page was the top ranking energy executive within the Bank of America investment arm.

Page's foreign policy experience comes into play when considering that he was the executive in charge of dealing with Russian energy investments, and those in the Caspian region, on behalf of Wall Street interests. He was also a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, one of the primary centers of policy analysis in the US, and one which is firmly within the orbit of the political and financial establishment. Again, one has to question the very notion that Trump's candidacy represents any sort of threat to the establishment. If anything, it seems to be merely a reflection of it, just like every other candidate.

Finally, George Papadopolous is the director of the Center for International Energy and Natural Resources Law & Security at theLondon Center of International Law Practice. A former adviser to the Ben Carson campaign, Papadopolous is a mostly unknown quantity in energy policy and analysis circles whose minimal published work and analysis has been entirely focused on Israeli gas discoveries in the Leviathan Gas Field,with Papadopolous arguing a pro-Israel position that boils down to Israeli-EU cooperation in the form of Israeli gas sales to Cyprus. He is also an advocate of further NATO expansion to include Cyprus, as well as the permanent stationing of US naval assets on the Greek island of Crete.

As the Washington Post noted, Papadopolous wrote in 2014 that, "Regional economic cooperation between Israel and Cyprus should be the guiding principle that anchors Israel economically to Europe," and in 2015 argued that "Israel's energy exports can serve as the basis for enhancing strategic relations between Israel and Egypt. They could also serve as the foundation for political and security cooperation with Greece and Cyprus."

These clearly pro-Israel analyses, coupled with the fact that his resume boasts publications in staunchly right wing, pro-Israeli outlets such as the Jamestown Foundation and Hudson Institute, among others, point to an obvious slant to his outlook. Indeed, there's been some question as to whether he's not simply a mouthpiece for Israel, as suggested by even pro-Israel think tanks such as the Center for a New American Security.

What to Expect from a Trump Foreign Policy

Just the early look at Trump's foreign policy advisers does not bode well for the notion of non-interventionism being hyped by many. While Trump has publicly voiced such

sentiments at times, it remains an open question whether he really believes them, or if he's just playing to the far right wing, isolationist tendency of many of his supporters. Is it genuine belief or pure demagoguery?

Sitting in the Oval Office, Trump will listen carefully to the advice of Walid Phares who no doubt will advocate for regime change and aggressive policies in the Middle East, as he has throughout the last three decades. Trump will be told of the need to dispense massively lucrative contracts to the private military firms with whom his close advisers Keith Kellogg and Joe Schmitz have long relationships. He'll be cajoled to follow through with aggressive actions that will benefit Big Oil and Wall Street, all the buddies and pals of people like Carter Page. Trump will "make deals" based on the advice of Israeli mouthpieces like George Papadopolous, not based on reason, let alone strategy in the interests of the US.

In practical terms, Trump will likely escalate America's mostly fictional and superficial "War on ISIS," embroiling the US in yet another regional war as he puts boots on the ground in Syria and/or Iraq. Trump will do nothing to rein in NATO, he might simply advocate for a shifting of the burden onto European NATO partners, something that will likely not happen.

Trump will aggressively deal with Russia and Putin, puffing out his chest and acting like some kind of strongman with Putin for public relations effect only. In fact, Trump is likely to damage further the US-Russia relationship with reckless rhetoric and policies, rather than moving toward genuine understanding and reconciliation. One can only cringe to imagine the blustering Trump alongside the always calm and collected Putin whose every move and word is calculated to maximum effect.

In short, Trump represents only the most superficial change in US foreign policy. His manner of plain speaking may be a breath of fresh air to Americans, and many around the world, who have tired of the usual political doublespeak and hollow babble, but his policies and actions will do little to stop the Empire. Trump is, simply put, Hope and ChangeTM of a different sort. And, as with the current Hope and ChangeTM the effect will be disastrous.

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