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Trump's Base Revolts Against Syria Strike

By Justin Raimondo
April 9, 2017

President Trump's former enemies in the mainstream media, which he has characterized as purveyors of "fake news," turned on a dime the moment he bombed Syria: the Establishment was thrilled that, suddenly, he was acting "presidential." CNN, a particular target of the President's ire, was gushing: NBC's Brian Williams, in a bizarre turn of phrase, hailed the "beauty" of the bombing, which killed a number of civilians. Democratic party politicians, with few exceptions, stood at attention and saluted, while Trump's Republican critics – notably John McCain and Lindsey Graham – praised the President while taking the opportunity to agitate for more extensive military action.

On the other hand, conservative media that has been supportive of Trump reviled the move: Breitbart readers weren't happy, Ann Coulter was furious, and Laura Ingraham was hardly supportive. Michael Savage declared himself a "conservative peacenik," Tucker Carlson was very skeptical, and on Twitter, the "Trump trolls" were trolling their former hero. British populist Nigel Farage, who led the Brexit referendum to victory, and who endorsed Trump, opined that Trump voters "will be scratching their heads" in bewilderment. Even over at *National Review*, a neocon redoubt, the voice of dissent was raised.

In short, Trump's most vocal supporters were joining the ranks of the antiwar movement, a development the media noted with the same vitriolic disdain it had formerly reserved for Trump himself:

As Carlson noted in the video above, “on this topic the news has never been faker.” *Politico* ran a piece excoriating “Trump’s troll army,” in rebellion against their ostensible leader’s policy, as racists and conspiracy mongers; the *New York Times* denounced anti-interventionists as representative of “a “small but influential white nationalist movement” on the “far right,” while the *Washington Post* described them as holding “racist, anti-Semitic and sexist” views.”

“Like so much news today,” said Carlson, “this isn’t news but propaganda designed to smear and deceive rather than to inform. On this topic “the ‘news’ has never been faker.”

Fake – just like the media’s coverage of Trump himself. And now that Trump has ditched one of the pillars of Trumpism, those who took it seriously are being treated exactly like he was treated before – with a barrage of outright lies.

It serves the War Party’s agenda to frame a narrative that characterizes anti-interventionists on the right as “racists,” “conspiracy-mongers,” etc., but the reality was more accurately described by Daniel McCarthy in *The National Interest*:

“Before he gets more deeply involved in Syria’s civil war, Donald Trump will have to win one at home. The Republican Party was already divided after failing to repeal Obamacare. Now the conflict has spread to the White House, where Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner are at daggers drawn. Even Trump’s most loyal grassroots and media supporters are in an uproar over the president’s evolving foreign policy, which has taken a turn toward the establishment as his domestic agenda sinks into the swamp he promised to drain.

“How much damage has the Syrian attack done to Trump? He’s lost Ann Coulter, who took to Twitter to vent her outrage and retweet lesser-known supporters who felt equally betrayed. He’s lost Justin Raimondo of Antiwar.com and the sizable blocs of Ron Paul and Pat Buchanan activists who had flocked to Trump’s ‘America First’ banner....

“The president has lost his base, or is in grave danger of doing so. But he has also picked up new support: from John McCain, Lindsey Graham, and Bill Kristol, all of whom praised the airstrike on Syria. Neoconservatism is suddenly back in fashion at the White House, or so it seems.”

While I’m not sure how “losing” little old me is significant, McCarthy is entirely correct about the President’s activist base: they are defecting in droves. And while the Syria turnabout is bad news, especially for the Syrian people, there is a bright and shining silver lining.

The millions of voters who voted for Trump based, at least in part, on his “America First” foreign policy views had to experience – and embrace – what might be called “Trumpism” before they could be react in bewilderment and disgust as he turned on a dime. Trumpism, in this sense, was a bridge they had to cross before coming to a full understanding of just what “America First” means. Trump’s many denunciations of our regime change policy in Syria, Libya, and throughout the world brought them halfway across that bridge – and his betrayal is bringing many thousands of them all the way over ... to us.

This is what sectarians of all stripes refuse to understand. With their static one-dimensional view of how political change comes about, they simply see Them and Us – and never the twain shall meet. How, they asked during the presidential election campaign, can those Trumpian troglodytes possibly be opposed to our foreign policy of perpetual war? What they didn't get – and still don't get – is that it took a catalytic figure like Trump to explode the phony left/right paradigm and imbue his supporters with some understanding of why the Empire exploits and impoverishes them. With this sudden reversal, the President is *increasing their understanding* of why this is so – because they aren't going along with it.

And they aren't going along with it because to even consider voting for Trump, while the media was hammering away at him and the Washington Establishment was sliming him as a dangerous "isolationist," took a not inconsiderable independence of mind. Whether Trump was sincere in making his various anti-interventionist pronouncements, particularly when it came to the Syria issue, is beside the point: the point is that millions of voters took him at his word. The idea that his supporters were "fooled" by his rhetoric is similarly irrelevant. I, for one, foresaw that he would contradict himself while in office, as I wrote back in January of this year:

"That Trump is inconsistent, and an imperfect vessel, hardly needs to be said. That the danger of war still looms over us is also a fact that none can deny. Yet all this is irrelevant in the face of the conceptual victory his winning the White House represents. Here is a candidate who campaigned against GOP foreign policy orthodoxy, explicitly rejecting the legacy of the Iraq war and even going so far as to call out the Bush administration for lying us into that war...."

"Yes, the Trump administration will take many actions that contradict the promise of their victory: that is already occurring. And we are covering that in these pages, without regard for partisan considerations: and yet it is necessary to step back and see the larger picture, looking past the journalistic details of the day-to-day news cycle. In short, it is necessary to take the long view and try to see what the ideological victory that was won this past November augurs for the future."

Well, we're living in that future right now: I have to admit it came a little sooner than I imagined, and a bit more abruptly than I thought possible. Yet that abruptness is a good thing: it dramatically underscores the contradiction between what Trump said and what he is now doing, and his most vocal supporters – particularly among the conservative opinion-making class – aren't taking it lying down. They are in open revolt. Taking advantage of that revolt, encouraging it and highlighting the contradictions, is the task we have before us.

As I said in my January column cited above, we have to take the long view: that is, we have to understand that we're building a movement. And the way to build that movement is not to stand aside and denounce those who are only halfway to understanding why the Empire is an albatross around our necks, but to patiently explain and let them learn why and how their leaders have betrayed them.

Betrayal is a painful experience: it is also a useful one. Physical pain is the body telling us that there's something in the environment that must be avoided: psychic pain plays the same instructive role. As Trump's supporters process what is undoubtedly a painful experience for

them, they will realize how and why it happened – and with a little help from Antiwar.com, the best of them will come to understand how to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

The post-Trump political landscape is far better for anti-interventionists than it was before the orange-haired real estate mogul came on the scene: there now exists a considerable faction within the GOP and its periphery that not only supports an anti-interventionist foreign policy but is also in open rebellion against the policies of the President they helped elect. They are sorely disappointed, but they are also angry – and energized. Because anger, after all – anger at injustice – is the primary motivating factor in politics, and never more so than at this moment in our history.

As I said in January:

“This isn't about Trump, the politician, or the journalistic trivia of the moment: we are engaged in a battle of ideas – and, slowly but surely, we are winning.”

We are indeed winning, and the War Party knows it: that's why *Politico*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* are doing their best to marginalize the emerging antiwar movement. They won't succeed, but our victory won't happen overnight. Nothing worth achieving ever does. As long as we take the long view, and adopt a movement-building perspective, the case for optimism is irrefutable.