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Return of the living (neo-con) dead

By Pepe Escobar

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Amid much hysteria, the notion has been widely peddled in the United States that President Obama's "new" foreign policy doctrine, announced last week at West Point, rejects neo-cons and neo-liberals and is, essentially, post-imperialist and a demonstration of realpolitik.

Not so fast. Although stepping back from the excesses of the Cheney regime - as in bombing whole nations into "democracy" - the "desire to lead" still crystallizes might is right.

Moreover, "exceptionalism" remains the norm. Now not so blatant, but still implemented via a nasty set of tools, from financial warfare to cyber-war, from National Endowment for Democracy-style promotion of "democracy" to Joint Special Operations Command-driven counter-terrorism, drone war and all shades of shadow wars.

In the early 2000s, the model was the physical destruction and occupation of Iraq. In the 2010s the model is the slow-mo destruction, by proxy, of Syria.

And still, those who "conceptualized" the destruction of Iraq keep rearing their *Alien*-like slimy head. Their icon is of course Robert Kagan - one of the founders of the apocalyptically funereal Project for a New American Century (PNAC) and husband of crypto-Ukrainian hell raiser Victoria "F**k the EU" Nuland (thus their dream of Ukraine as the Khaganate of Nulands, or simply Nulandistan.)

Kagan has been devastatingly misguided on everything, as in his 2003 best-seller *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, an eulogy of "benign" Americans standing guard against the "threats" (as in Muslim fundamentalism) emanating from a Hobbesian world way beyond the cozy Kantian precinct inhabited by Europe.

Then, in *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (2008), the "evil" was not Muslim fundamentalism anymore (too shabby), but the emerging of those vast autocracies, Russia and China, antithetical to Western democracies. But with *The World America Made* (2012), the paradisiacal shining city on the hill would once again triumph, more than capable to see those autocracies off; after all, the only reliable guarantee of global peace is American exceptionalism.

Kagan still commands the attention even of the otherwise aloof Commander-in-Chief, who avidly consumed *The World America Made* before his 2012 State of the Union Address, in which he proclaimed "America is back".

It's enlightening to flash back to Kagan writing in the Weekly Standard in March 2011, sounding like an awestruck schoolboy praising Obama; "He thoroughly rejected the so-called realist approach, extolled American exceptionalism, spoke of universal values and insisted that American power should be used, when appropriate, on behalf of those values."

Any similarity with Obama's "new" foreign policy doctrine is, indeed, intentional.

Catfight at the Singapore corral

Now comes Kagan's latest opus, "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire: What our tired country still owes the world", with a sorry mess already inbuilt in the title (he's never read Paul Kennedy after all). History tells us that superpowers do retire because of over-extension - not only military but mostly economic and fiscal, as in facing bankruptcy.

Yet it's hopeless to expect from Kagan and the neo-con nebula anything other than blindness to the lessons of history - with a special, tragic mention of Shock and Awe, trampling of Geneva Conventions, and institutionalized torture. Their parochial dichotomy is either eternal American global hegemony or outright chaos.

Progressives in the US still try to save the day, frantically calling for a core "restoration" of American economic and democratic health; a rather impossible undertaking when casino capitalism rules and the US is now for all practical purposes an oligarchy. These dreamers actually believe this "restoration" is what Obama has done or is trying to do; and that would project the US once again as a global model - and thus "encourage" democracy everywhere. Sorry to break the news, but for the overwhelming majority of the genuine, fact on the ground "international community", the notion of the US promoting democracy is now D.O.A.

So under the banner of exceptionalism - versus the competing birth of a Eurasian century - it's been a fascinating exercise to witness the catfight at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore,

which I described last year as the Spielbergs and Clooneys of the military sphere all locked up in a Star Wars room (actually a ballroom with chandeliers at the Shangri-La Hotel.)

It all started with Shinzo Abe, the militaristic prime minister of that American protectorate, Japan, denouncing "unilateral efforts" to alter the strategic status quo in Asia. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, piled up, saying Asia-Pacific was becoming less stable because of "coercion and provocation" by China. And Pentagon supremo Chuck Hagel also blasted Beijing, accusing it of "destabilizing, unilateral actions" in the South China Sea.

But then Lt Gen Wang Guanzhong, the deputy chief of general staff of the PLA, counterpunched in kind, saying Hagel's talk was "full of hegemony, full of words of threat and intimidation" and part of "a provocative challenge against China".

Major General Zhu Chenghu even allowed himself to be condescending (oh, those barbarians ...); "The Americans are making very, very important strategic mistakes right now ... If you take China as an enemy, China will absolutely become the enemy of the US."

Major General Zhu also accused Hagel of hypocrisy; "Whatever the Chinese do is illegal, and whatever the Americans do is right." Zhu was quick to register Hagel's own threat, as in "the US will not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged." Translation: Don't mess with the exceptionalist. WE are the international order.

It's as if everyone was reading from Kagan's playbook. The difference is that Beijing is not Baghdad, and will not respond to threats by lying down. Instead, it is deploying selective, savvy, tactical moves all across the Western Pacific chessboard. Washington's Asian network of vassals/clients/protectorates is and will be slowly but surely undermined. And on top of it, Beijing clearly sees that both Hagel and Kerry - who know next to nothing about the complexities of Asia - are clearly panicking.

Those Deng Xiaoping dictum days - from "crossing the river by feeling the stones" to "carry a low profile" - are in the past. Now we're talking about the imminent number one economic power, already the world's top trading nation and America's top creditor.

Highway to Hillary

Russia - and not the US - is now the key partner or broker in negotiating hardcore international conflicts. The recent flurry of China-Russia energy and trade agreements, an essential part of their strategic partnership; the progressive integration and concerted economic/financial strategy of the BRICS; and even the slow moving process of Latin American integration all point towards a multipolar world.

Which bring us back to Obama's "new" foreign policy doctrine. Let's quickly survey the recent record.

Obama only refrained from pursuing his reckless, self-imposed red line and bombing Syria because he was saved (from himself) at the eleventh hour by Russian diplomacy.

The Iran dossier remains vulnerable to relentless pressure by neo-cons/Israel lobby/sectors of the weaponizing industry, with the Obama administration introducing extraneous factors bound to sidestep the negotiation.

Obama's sanctions on Russia because of Ukraine were not only unlawful; they are peripheral, as astute European Union business leaders quickly recognized.

A simulacrum of withdrawal is being pushed in Afghanistan - to be replaced by all-out shadow war.

And the Obama administration - covertly and not so covertly - has been supporting neo-nazis in Ukraine and jihadists in Syria.

All this is still not enough for the Kagan bunch - the "conceptual" architects of the 9/11 wars, who always wanted Obama to bomb Syria; bomb Iran; start a war with Russia over Crimea; and even, sooner rather than later, bomb China to prevent it from getting back to number one. Hobbesians gone mad - wallowing in their psychotic sense of perennial entitlement - will stop at nothing to prevent the emergence of a multipolar world. It's Exceptionalist Empire with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as global Robocop, or hell.

Moscow and Beijing, to say the least, are not exactly impressed; rather, they detect desperation. Yet things could - and should - get much nastier, irrespective of imploding Khaganates. Just wait for the Hillary doctrine.