

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد      بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم      از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/21/neoconservatives-so-wrong-for-so-long-iraq-war-iran-deal/>

## So Wrong for So Long

**Why neoconservatives are never right.**

By Stephen M. Walt

August 21, 2015

Over the past few weeks, proponents of the nuclear deal with Iran — from President Barack Obama on down — have marshaled a powerful attack on some of the deal’s most prominent opponents. Specifically, they’ve been pointing out an indisputable fact: Many of the individuals and organizations that are most actively lobbying and speaking out against the deal helped dream up the idea of invading Iraq or worked hard to convince Congress and the American people to go along with the idea. The logic of the pro-deal camp is simple: Given that the opponents were so catastrophically wrong about the Iraq War, no one should listen to their advice today.

I agree with this basic argument, of course, but opponents of the deal do have one line of defense against the “Wrong on Iraq, Wrong on Iran” meme. It is possible someone could have been dead wrong about the wisdom of invading Iraq in 2003, but nonetheless be correct to oppose the nuclear deal with Iran today. None of us is infallible, and it is at least conceivable that Bill Kristol, Elliott Abrams, James Woolsey, Fred Hiatt, Max Boot, et al. could have blown it big-time in 2002 — but be absolutely right this time around.

Conceivable, I suppose, but highly unlikely. Why? Because their views in 2002 aren’t independent from the views they’re expressing today. On the contrary, their earlier support for the Iraq War and their opposition to the Iran deal stem from the basic neoconservative worldview that informs their entire approach to foreign policy.

To be more specific, the problem isn't that these people just happened to be embarrassingly wrong about Iraq. After all, plenty of other people were equally misguided back then, including many people who now support the deal today. Nor is the problem the neocons' stubborn and morally dubious refusal to admit they were wrong and take responsibility for the lives and money they squandered.

No, the real problem is that the neoconservative worldview — one that still informs the thinking of many of the groups and individuals who are most vocal in opposing the Iran deal — is fundamentally flawed. Getting Iraq wrong wasn't just an unfortunate miscalculation, it happened because their theories of world politics were dubious and their understanding of how the world works was goofy.

When your strategic software is riddled with bugs, you should expect a lot of error messages.  
When your strategic software is riddled with bugs, you should expect a lot of error messages.

What are the main flaws that consistently lead neoconservatives astray?

For starters, neoconservatives think balance-of-power politics doesn't really work in international affairs and that states are strongly inclined to “bandwagon” instead. In other words, they think weaker states are easy to bully and never stand up to powerful adversaries. Their faulty logic follows that other states will do whatever Washington dictates provided we demonstrate how strong and tough we are. This belief led them to conclude that toppling Saddam would send a powerful message and cause other states in the Middle East to kowtow to us. If we kept up the pressure, our vast military power would quickly transform the region into a sea of docile pro-American democracies.

What happened, alas, was that the various states we were threatening didn't jump on our bandwagon. Instead, they balanced and then took steps to make sure we faced significant and growing resistance. In particular, Syria and Iran (the next two states on the neocons' target list), cooperated even further with each other and helped aid the anti-American insurgency in Iraq itself. Neocons were outraged by this behavior, but it shouldn't have surprised anyone who understood Realism 101. At the same time, long-standing U.S. allies were upset by our actions and distanced themselves from us or else they took advantage of our excesses and free-rode at our expense. In short, the neoconservatives' belief that the United States could browbeat and intimidate others into doing our bidding was dead wrong.

Today, of course, opposition to the Iran deal reflects a similar belief that forceful resolve would enable Washington to dictate whatever terms it wants. As I've written before, this idea is the myth of a “better deal.” Because neocons assume states are attracted to strength and easy to intimidate, they think rejecting the deal, ratcheting up sanctions, and threatening war will cause Iran's government to finally cave in and dismantle its entire enrichment program. On the contrary, walking away from the deal will stiffen Iran's resolve, strengthen its hard-liners, increase its interest in perhaps actually acquiring a nuclear weapon someday, and cause the other members of the P5+1 to part company with the United States.

The neoconservative worldview also exaggerates the efficacy of military force and downplays the value of diplomacy. Military force is an essential component of national power, of course, but neocons tend to see it as a magical tool that can accomplish all sorts of wonderful things (such as the creation of workable democracies) for which it is not really designed. In reality, military force is a crude instrument whose effects are hard to foresee and one which almost always produces unintended consequences (see under: Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, etc.). So it was in Iraq, and the results of a direct military conflict with Iran would be equally unpredictable.

Moreover, neocons believe military force is a simple tool that can be turned on and off like a spigot. If the United States uses force and things go badly, they seem to think the nation can just pull out quickly and live to fight another day. But that's not how things work in the real world of politics: Once forces are committed, the military brass will demand the chance to win a clear victory, and politicians will worry about the nation's prestige and their own political fortunes. The conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia should remind us that it's a lot easier to get into wars than it is to get out of them, but that lesson has been lost on most neoconservatives.

Third, the neoconservatives have a simplistic and ahistorical view of democracy itself. They claim their main goal is spreading freedom and democracy (except for Palestinians, of course), but they have no theory to explain how this will happen or how toppling a foreign government with military force will magically cause democracy to emerge. Instead, they believe the desire to live in freedom is hardwired into human DNA, and all one has to do is remove the bad guys at the top. Once they are gone, the now-liberated population will forget past grievances, form political parties, embrace tolerance, line up for orderly elections, accept the resulting outcomes willingly, and offer grateful thanks to Uncle Sam.

It would be nice if that Pollyannaish scenario were accurate, but such views betray near-total ignorance of the prerequisites for meaningful democracy and the actual history of democratic growth in the West itself. In fact, the development of liberal democracy was a long, contentious, imperfect, and often violent process in Western Europe and North America, and anyone familiar with that history would have known the neocons' formula for democratic change was doomed from the start.

Fourth, as befits a group of armchair ideologues whose primary goal has been winning power inside the Beltway, neoconservatives are often surprisingly ignorant about the actual conditions of the countries whose politics and society they want to transform. Hardly any neoconservatives knew very much about Iraq before the United States invaded — if they had, they might have reconsidered the whole scheme — and their characterizations of Iran today consist of scary caricatures bearing little resemblance to Iran's complicated political and social reality. In addition to flawed theories, in short, the neoconservative worldview also depends on an inaccurate reading of the facts on the ground.

Last but not least, the neoconservatives' prescriptions for U.S. foreign policy are perennially distorted by a strong attachment to Israel, which Max Boot (and others) have described as a “key tenet” of the entire movement. There's nothing wrong with such attachments per se, of course, but it has crippled their ability to give sensible policy advice to U.S. politicians. In particular,

neoconservatives tend to believe that what's good for Israel is good for the United States — and vice versa — which is why they see no conflict between their attachment to Israel and their loyalty to the United States. But no two states have identical interests all the time, and when the interests of two countries conflict, people who feel strongly about both are forced to decide which of these feelings is going to take priority.

Over the past few weeks, some proponents of the deal have pointed out — correctly — that some opponents don't like the deal because they think it is bad for Israel and because the Netanyahu government is dead set against it. As one might expect, pointing out these obvious facts has led some opponents of the deal to accuse proponents (including President Obama) of anti-Semitism. But as Lara Friedman, J.J. Goldberg, and Peter Beinart have made clear, this charge is absurd, even laughable. Among other things, it appears a majority of American Jews support the deal — and so do plenty of distinguished figures in Israel's own national security establishment. If anything, it is Netanyahu's efforts to persuade American Jews that it is their duty to support him, rather than their own president, that echoes those hateful anti-Semitic canards about “dual loyalty.”

Instead of being a serious criticism, this familiar smear is really just a way to change the subject and to put proponents of the deal on the defensive for pointing out the obvious. Fortunately, in this case the charge just doesn't seem to be sticking, and its appearance is just another sign that opponents don't have rational arguments or solid evidence to justify their opposition.

The bottom line: The fact that the neoconservatives, AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents, and other groups in the Israel lobby were wrong about the Iraq War does not by itself mean that they are necessarily wrong about the Iran deal. But when you examine their basic views on world politics and their consistent approach to U.S. Middle East policy, it becomes clear this is not a coincidence at all. Support for the Iraq War and opposition to the Iran deal flow from the same flawed premises, and that's why following their advice today would be as foolish as it was back in 2003.