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The Long Road From 9/11

By Justin Raimondo

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I heard it before I saw it: the horror in the voice of a TV anchor on the morning of September 11, 2001. As my father shook me awake – “Wake up, look at this!” – I shot straight up in my bed and beheld the scene unfolding on the television screen: a plane plowing straight into a skyscraper and coming out the other side, sheering off the top like Death wielding a scythe.

I had arrived in New York a few hours earlier on a plane from California, on the first leg of a trip to Serbia. I was slated to travel with a delegation of writers who had been invited to that recently-bombed country by the government of President Vojislav Kostunica, the liberal nationalist successor to the malevolent Slobodan Milosevic. As virtually the only visible opposition to Bill Clinton’s “humanitarian” crusade to establish the state of Kosovo – today the heroin and human trafficking capital of Europe – Antiwar.com was well known in Serbia, and I was looking forward to visiting the crime scene. But as I watched the drama of 9/11 unfold, I knew I wouldn’t be going anywhere.

As news of the attack on the Pentagon was broadcast by a clearly panicked newscaster a shock of pure fear ran up and down my spine. I recalled that the Indian Point nuclear power plant wasn’t all that far away: my father had worked there at some point in his career. I imagined that it probably wasn’t all that closely guarded – and the hair on my neck stood straight up.

Day One of the Long War was dawning.

In the days and months to come, a pall fell over the nation as the smoke emanating from the isle of Manhattan spread out and seemed to cover the whole country. People forget the atmosphere of those dark days: the war hysteria welling up in a collective spasm of fearful vituperation, seeking the closest target. Since Osama bin Laden and the hijackers weren't available, this hate campaign was directed at anyone who dared question the narrative of a blameless and simon-pure America ambushed by demons.

To reference America's longstanding occupation of great portions of the Middle East, and our government's support for bloodthirsty tyrants, from Riyadh to Tel Aviv, was considered close to treason. The writer Susan Sontag was pilloried for registering the mildest dissent: led by the Bush administration's intellectual bully-boy-in-chief, the writer Andrew Sullivan, a campaign was unleashed against anyone who opposed the neoconservative project of "draining the swamp" of the Middle East. Sullivan, you'll recall, even went after some obscure poet whose poem he claimed had blasphemed the memory of 9/11 – a misreading he later acknowledged, but only after the damage had been done and the heretic had been defamed.

When the mysterious anthrax attacks showed up in the US mails, Sullivan fantasized that Iraq was behind it and demanding that we use nuclear weapons to attack Saddam Hussein. And around the same time the Bush administration began tying Iraq to 9/11, falsely implying that the Iraqis had been in league with Osama bin Laden and the hijackers: the march to war was on, and anyone who opposed it was fair game for the witch-hunters. "You're either with us," declaimed President Bush, "or you're with the terrorists."

It was open season on anyone who questioned the war plans of the administration and the Thought Police did not neglect us here at Antiwar.com: in the weeks and months after 9/11 we received hundreds of death threats. Sullivan and the crazed Stephen Schwartz tried to link us to Ismail Royer, arrested on charges of violating the Neutrality Act. Schwartz's publisher, David Horowitz, ran a series of articles attacking myself and Antiwar.com as being little short of Al Qaeda supporters: one piece memorably fantasized that a second 9/11 would see me put up against a wall and shot. Around the same time the FBI started an investigation of myself, our webmaster Eric Garris, and Antiwar.com based on the supposition that we are "agents of a foreign power."

Fast forward to September, 2015: Dick Cheney is addressing the American Enterprise Institute, railing against the historic deal with Iran that short-circuited a war the former Vice President and his neoconservative supporters had been demanding since the days of the Bush administration. Cheney, whose office was the epicenter of a cabal that lied us into war in Iraq, broadcasting "intelligence" that turned out to be entirely fabricated, was up there predicting that an Iranian nuclear attack on the United States would be the fruit of the Iran deal. It was a deja-vu moment: the same lies, the same fearmongering, the same scam, the same audience of assembled neocons cheering him on – the difference being that the target is now Tehran instead of Baghdad.

Yet something else was different: the country was no longer in the throes of the post-9/11 syndrome. The Long War – still ongoing after all these years – had exhausted the country, and

the lies that led to the invasion and conquest of Iraq had been exposed. The consequences of that disastrous war were spilling out into the headlines even as Cheney spoke: ISIS, the mutant offspring of Al Qaeda, was overrunning the Middle East, and chaos was enveloping the whole region. The architects of the neoconservative project had been discredited, and driven from office if not from public life. From the height of his power during the Bush years, when wags spoke of the “Cheney administration,” the former Vice President had been reduced to the least popular politician in the country, a Darth Vader-like figure often mocked on late night comedy shows.

Most importantly, the dissenters were no longer underground. The reign of terror presided over by the neocons had receded, and the opposition had emerged from the catacombs years ago, living to fight another day – with a significant degree of success. Instead of fearfully lying low, anti-interventionists of every political stripe had unfurled their banners and launched a counterattack. And one of them arose in the midst of Cheney’s speech – a young woman affiliated with the antiwar group Code Pink named Michaela Anang – and, unfurling a banner, demanded to know “Why is anyone listening to him?”

Security immediately surrounded her and escorted her out of the building as she shouted “Stop the warmongering!” – but before they dragged her out someone in the audience grabbed her banner and tried to pull it out of her hands. She resisted and a tug of war ensued. The man gripped the cloth banner and yanked at it while Michaela stood there steadfastly resisting him, seemingly without exerting much effort, until he finally gave up and collapsed in a heap, falling back in his chair.

The defeated man is no random person: his name is Patrick Clawson and he’s the research director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a spin-off of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the premier lobbying powerhouse that acts as Israel’s agent in Washington. Like many neocons, Clawson is a former Trotskyist who decided giving up class war for the War Party was a clever career move. He was a key player in the propaganda barrage that preceded the Iraq war and a fervent supporter of Ahmed Chalabi and his fellow “heroes in error.” And as a loyal shill for the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Clawson has been a fanatical advocate of war with Iran. At a 2012 WINEP conference on “How to Build US-Israeli Coordination on Preventing an Iranian Nuclear Breakout,” Clawson responded to a question from the audience on what the US should do if the negotiations with Iran failed:

“Crisis initiation is really tough. It’s very hard for me to see how the United States President can get us to war with Iran.

“The traditional way America gets to war is what would be best for US interests. Some people might think that Mister Roosevelt wanted to get us into World War II. You might recall that we had to wait for Pearl Harbor. Some people might think that Mister Wilson wanted to get us into World War I. You may recall that we had to wait for the Lusitania episode. Some people might think that Mister Johnson wanted to send troops into Viet Nam. You may recall that we had to wait for the Gulf of Tonkin episode. We didn’t go to war with Spain until the Maine exploded. May I point out that Mister Lincoln did not feel he could call out the federal army until Fort

Sumter was attacked, which is why he ordered the commander at Fort Sumter to do exactly that thing that the South Carolinians said would cause an attack.

“So, if, in fact, the Iranians aren’t going to compromise, it would be best if somebody else started the war... We could step up the pressure... We are in the game of using covert means against the Iranians. We could get nastier at that.”

Nasty enough to create another Gulf of Tonkin fraud – a false flag incident that would serve as justification for an attack on Iran? While Clawson hurriedly and somewhat unconvincingly said “I’m not advocating that,” he clearly *was* advocating exactly that – and perhaps suggesting that his Israeli sponsors might be up to the job.

Yes, “crisis initiation is really tough,” but where there’s a will there’s a way. Except it’s getting harder for Clawson and his fellow neocons to pull this off: people are on to their game. As if to underscore the neocons’ lack of political heft, Clawson couldn’t even pull that protest banner out of the hands of a woman half his size: he just collapsed, humiliated, as he fell into his seat rubbing his injured hand.

Furthermore, Michaela Anang’s message – “Why is anybody listening to this man?” – is getting out there, because the truth is that hardly anybody is listening to Cheney. The supreme irony is that even as Cheney spoke the remaining on-the-fence Senators were announcing their support for the Iran deal, giving the administration a veto-proof majority.

Not that this stopped the neocons: indeed, they accelerated their efforts, supposedly aimed at stopping the deal, with a move by the misnamed “Freedom Caucus” in the GOP congressional ranks to delay the Iran deal vote. The Republican leadership had been planning such a vote but this was nixed by the Freedom Caucusers, who came up with a complicated three-part plan, involving three separate votes. The first would be on a resolution declaring that the President and his State Department have not revealed the full text of the Iran deal, and that because they are hiding the “secret” “side agreements,” the deal is illegitimate. The second would be on a bill forbidding the lifting of sanctions. The third would be a vote on a resolution approving the deal, with the GOP majority poised to vote it down.

The first phase of this three-parter is the crucial one: as Max Fisher points out over at Vox, this would give the Republicans an ongoing issue with which to infatuate talk radio habitués and the GOP base. And, as per usual with this crowd, their contention has nothing to do with reality. The “secret side agreement” is the IAEA’s arrangements with Iran, which the US is not a party to, involving purely technical details. The IAEA has a similar “secret” agreement with the US, and indeed all parties to the Nonproliferation Treaty, and it is “secret” for the simple reason that countries with nuclear programs – especially the United States, for one – don’t want to advertise the details to the world.

Members of Congress who haven’t always gone along with the War Party’s agenda, and yet don’t want to incur their wrath, are using this pretext as a cover for their complete capitulation to the neocons’ anti-Iran jihad. Rep. Justin Amash pretends to fall for the “secret side deal” canard,

but his rationalization is transparently false, as one can see by carefully reading Amash's argument:

“The Review Act requires the president to submit to Congress the text of any nuclear deal reached with Iran. Submission of the nuclear deal triggers a period of review for Congress to analyze the agreement – a period during which the president is prohibited from taking any actions to lift statutory sanctions.

“The precise language of the Review Act recognizes that a comprehensive nuclear deal includes many separate components, and that for members of Congress to accurately assess the merits of the agreement, Congress must have access to all portions of the agreement. Thus, the Review Act carefully defines ‘agreement’ to include ‘annexes, appendices, codicils, side agreements, implementing materials, documents, and guidance, technical or other understandings, and any related agreements.’

“We now know that there are at least two side agreements between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that are integral to the nuclear deal but nevertheless will not be shared with Congress.”

The IAEA's agreement with Iran is secret, including from the United States. As the international arbiter enforcing the terms of the Nonproliferation Treaty, the IAEA isn't an American sock puppet: it is a neutral observer and its agreements with member states regarding the details of inspections and other technical matters are confidential. The administration can't hand over documents to which it has no access.

Yes, the Review Act states that documents dealing with agreements made “between Iran and any other parties” must be made public by the administration, and yet Congress has no authority over the IAEA – unless Amash is arguing that congressional authority has to be extended to Vienna in order for the Iran deal to pass “constitutional” muster.

Hiding behind the skirts of the Constitution – or what they interpret as the intent of the Constitution – is a typical maneuver practiced by the Rand Paul wing of the ostensibly “libertarian” movement in order to explain away their total capitulation to the War Party. Amash's non-explanation is reminiscent of Rand Paul's supremely stupid legislation demanding that Congress issue a formal declaration of war against ISIS – as if clothing an invasion of yet another Middle Eastern country in “constitutional” clothing would somehow make it more palatable to libertarians.

Amash goes on and on, trying to put his vote in a “constitutional” framework, but ultimately winds up borrowing a line from none other than Donald Trump, declaring:

“Finally, even if we set aside the constitutional defects and related consequences discussed above, it is unconscionable that the Obama administration would negotiate a final agreement that does not secure the release of the three American hostages held in Iran – Saeed Abedini, Amir Hekmati, and Jason Rezaian – or information on the whereabouts of a former FBI agent abducted in Iran, Robert Levinson. The nuclear deal provides Iran access to billions of dollars in

unfrozen assets and the almost immediate removal of major U.S. and international economic sanctions on Iran's financial and energy sectors, followed by the termination of most nuclear-related sanctions on Iran in just a few years. If Iran is unwilling to return American hostages to their families as part of this agreement, then we cannot trust that Iran will act in good faith as sanctions are lifted."

What this tells us is that Amash never did have an "open mind," as he claims, regarding the Iran deal, because any serious student of the US-Iran negotiations, or diplomacy in general, knows that when it comes to bridging the gap between longtime adversaries only *narrowing the framework* of any agreement will lead to a successful conclusion. The release of the three people being held in Iran has nothing whatsoever to do with making sure Iran doesn't develop nuclear weapons, and it is simply silly (in a Trumpish sort of way) to assert that failure to release them shows "we cannot trust that Iran will act in good faith as sanctions are lifted." If Amash and his phony "Freedom Caucus" buddies are going to demand this, then why not include a demand that the Iranians free *all* their political prisoners, institute complete religious freedom, and give every oppressed Iranian a pony?

Amash is tired of fighting his own party: he recently survived a tough primary fight in the course of which his neocon-funded opponent accused him of being "Al Qaeda's best friend." And in spite of his pretensions, Amash is no Ron Paul – he doesn't want to be the only Republican congressman to buck the neoconservative tide on this issue. If he thinks the neocons will let up on him because of his opposition to the Iran deal he had better think again, but I emphasize his pitiful capitulation in order to make a larger point.

The continuation of the neocon campaign against the Iran deal in spite of the fact that the deal will go through anyway has a purpose, one which includes cementing neoconservative control of the GOP. The Republican party is, today, an agent of a foreign power; it is the party of Benjamin Netanyahu. This was formalized when House Speaker John Boehner invited Bibi to undermine the Iran agreement in a speech to Congress, an invitation extended behind the President's back. Not since the heyday of the cold war, when the Communist Party USA functioned openly as Moscow's instrument, has an American political party bended its knee so brazenly to an overseas master. The battle over the Iran deal has effectively eliminated whatever reluctance some GOPers had to becoming Bibi's congressional handmaidens. If the Iran deal confirms that Congress is no longer "Israeli-occupied territory," as Pat Buchanan once put it, then its Republican component is now the political arm of the IDF.

Patrick Clawson and his crowd have lost the tug-of-war with the pro-American faction of the foreign policy establishment: that's the significance of the Iran deal, and its importance should not be underestimated. This is a tipping point, a real sea-change – but the neocons never give up, and they never give an inch. We underestimate them at our peril.

It's now fourteen years after 9/11, and the War Party's momentum has been slowed, albeit not entirely halted. But this is no time for complacency. What they are counting on is their staying power within the GOP, and their many connections in the Democratic party – including their influence over Hillary Clinton, whose recent speech on the Iran deal was framed in terms of her total allegiance to Israel. She pledged a ramped-up US military presence in the immediate

vicinity of Iran, perhaps giving Clawson new hope that another Gulf of Tonkin is in the works. He lost the tug-of-war with that protester, but don't think he and his comrades will stop trying to pull the country their way.

A "Thank you!" Note: I want to thank all of our many readers who gave to the fundraising campaign this time around. Yes, we finally made it – and it's all because of our faithful readers and supporters, who have stood by us through thick and thin. We here at Antiwar.com are working day and night to give you the best coverage of US foreign policy – and its horrific consequences – on the Internet. We report the news and we offer opinion: the first a guide to what is going on – what is really going on – and the second a guide to what we ought to do about it. We educate so you can be active in the worldwide movement for a more peaceful world. We aren't just making the case for a noninterventionist foreign policy in abstract terms: we are educating the public in order to make peace a reality. Your tax-deductible donations make that possible. So thank you, again: I am personally dedicated to earning your support every time I sit down at my computer and start another column.