Confronting The Islamic Republic: Trump vs. Rhodes Round Table

Three years into the Trump administration, the USA has certainly escalated tensions with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iran deal has been “ripped up,” new sanctions have been imposed, and the threat of war becomes more intensely visible amid a cycle of regional maritime incidents often involving the oil industry. However, there seems to be solid disagreements among the circles of power about how much to escalate tensions with Iran. The basis for these differences, and what they represent, is worth examining carefully.

Cecil Rhodes’ Round Table

In 1895, the wealthy British capitalist for whom the settler state of Rhodesia was eventually named, spoke frankly to members of his own class. Cecil Rhodes described a strategy for quelling dissent and labor unrest in the British homeland, while expanding the super-profits of British bankers.

He wrote: “I was in the East End of London (a working-class quarter) yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry for ‘bread! bread!’ and on my way home I pondered over the scene and I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism…. My cherished idea is a solution for the social problem, i.e., in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.”

Lenin famously quoted Rhodes passage about visiting London’s East End in his book “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.” Lenin argued that imperialism was stabilizing western capitalist countries by creating a layers of high paid workers called the “Aristocracy of Labor.”

The mode of thinking Lenin pointed to seems to live on in Rhodes successors and the apparatus that he built. Rhodes wanted to pacify social conflict while expanding the British Empire. His vision wasn’t one of dramatic profits, big wars, etc. Rather it was a carefully controlled society in which the “rabble” both at home, and abroad were carefully managed and big dramatic turn arounds or unpredictable events rarely, if ever, occurred.

Rhodes legacy most certainly lives on in not only British but also American politics. As Dr. Carol Quigley, the historian and scholar employed by the US Department of Defense and mentor of President Bill Clinton, documented in his book “The Anglo-American Establishment,” Rhodes began the process of organizing one of the most important factions in the western world’s power elite. The first five wills of Cecil Rhodes left money for the creation of a secret society, and though it was removed from his final will, according to Quigley, the process had already begun by the time of his death.

However, the “secret society” intended to strategize and promote the ideals of British capitalism evolved into something much less cloak and dagger, and more loose and academic. Lord Alfred Milner and others oversaw the assembling of Britain’s prominent intellectual and political figures, as well as prominent bankers and industrialists into a kind of association. The Rockefeller oil dynasty got involved, as did many of the wealthiest and most politically prominent Americans. At meetings that were closed to the general public, these selected people were assembled to receive a political and ideological orientation, and to network among themselves.

An elaborate mechanism for facilitating the gathering of information, the networking of elites and the lobbying of important institutions emerged. Rhodes’ brainchild now guides discourse and fosters strategic conversation among the western elite. The unstated goal is maintaining US and British hegemony, more specifically the hegemony of
financial institutions based in New York and London.

From the Rhodes society and the Milner Group emerged the “Round Table” and eventually the institution known as the Council on Foreign Relations. But the CFR is not alone. It accompanies the various Rockefeller funded think-tanks, the Ford Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and so many others. It is inside the CFR’s conferences, in the classrooms of Harvard and Yale, in the Rhodes Scholarship program, the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral commission, and many other “centers” and “institutes” that the future of the United States and the world is carefully planned out.

This “Eastern Establishment” does not represent the single source of power in US politics, and its membership do not all think and march in complete lockstep. While it is the most powerful axis within the power structure of the western world, it is quite apparent that it has many detractors. In the 1950s, the John Birch Society published endless screeds accusing those associated with these institutions of being Communists. During the Cold War, factions among the wealthy on the European mainland, who favored a better relationship with the Soviet Union, frequently pointed to Britain and America’s elite as having interests contrary to their own.

“Globalist” Strategies vs. The New Right

The CFR and the rest of the descendants of Rhodes’ network push a cool-headed soft-power strategy for gradually rolling back multi-polarity, eradicating socialism and alternative structures in global trade. Within the USA and Western Europe they favor social cohesion by means of pacifying and controlling the population. The voices extolling their values have been Bertrand Russell, Margaret Sanger, Susan Sontag, Milton Friedman, Leo Strauss, among others.

While the military industrial complex screams “Peace Through Strength”; while fracking companies and low level oil tycoons scream “Drill Now!”; while Libertarians push a fantasy of unregulated “anarcho-capitalism”, the Eastern Establishment pushes a much different strategy. They speak of “slow growth,” progressive reform, sustainable development, an “open society,” “open global market” and “open international system.” Among Trump supporters the term “globalists” has caught on as a vague understanding of this division, and why so much of the elite distrusts the current US President.

For decades the primary enemy of the Round Table has been described as “totalitarianism” and “human rights violations,” most specifically, those who stand in the way of “free trade.” More recently the CFR has extended its named enemies to include “Populism,” gender inequality, global warming and overpopulation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been in the crosshairs of the Eastern Establishment since it was born in the 1979 revolution. The Iranian government came to power with slogans of “Neither East Nor West” “Not Capitalism But Islam” and “War of Poverty Against Wealth.”

Iranian oil, nominally nationalized under the monarchy, has become the property of a state that is rooted among the population, and controls the economy. The Islamic Republic draws its strength from local basigue councils based in neighborhoods, and from a very ideological section of the population that thoroughly rejects western capitalism and embraces Islamic anti-imperialism. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not accountable to the elected government, but only to the Supreme Leader himself. Its members view dying for the Islamic Revolution as the greatest possible spiritual achievement, with the faces of prominent martyrs on display throughout Iranian cities.

In essence, the non-western, non-capitalist revolutionary government of the Islamic Republic is everything that Cecil Rhodes society was established to oppose. The Islamic Republic has become a beacon of encouragement to other forces around the world who seek to end the rule of western capitalism. The Islamic Movement of Nigeria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Latin American socialists, the Syrian Arab Republic, the two Eurasian superpowers, and many other forces of resistance to unipolarity have spoken of Iran in positive terms.

Opposing Trump & Netanyahu as Ineffective

The publication of the Council on Foreign Relations, Foreign Affairs magazine, published an essay by two scholars, representing the Eastern Establishment faction of US politics. Steven Simon served on the National Security Council during the administrations of Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. David Benjamin was Coordinator of counter-terrorism for the US State Department from 2009 to 2012. Their essay "America's Great Satan: The 40 Year Obsession With Iran" is a rather open critique of the Trump administrations escalation of tensions with Iran.

Critiquing Trump’s rhetoric about an “Iranian Threat” the essay reads: “Trump has inflated this to cartoonish
proportions. Iran is not an existential threat to the United States, but a serious conflict with it.”

The essay later opines: “All terrorism is bad, but the hawks exaggerate the threat posed by Iranian state sponsored terrorism which is lackluster compared to the Jihadi terrorism that has at times been tolerated or even financed by Washington’s sunni partners.”

The article goes on to warn: “The current US approach to Iran also risks driving a wedge between the USA and Europe.” Trump’s problematic policies in Iran are blamed on that fact that “The distorting effect of Israeli influence on US policy toward Iran has been especially pronounce since 2012.”

While Trump’s Department of Justice has arrested prominent figures at J.P. Morgan, and most of the major TV networks like CNN and MSNBC represent the American establishment in opposing Trump, the current US President does indeed have a circle of wealthy patrons. The Devos Foundation, handing out the wealth of Trump’s billionaire education secretary, the owners of hardware chain store monopoly Home Depot, and Sheldon Adelson, the Nevada real-estate and gambling tycoon, all put their money into pro-Trump and conservative causes.

Who do they represents? Home Depot and the Devos Foundation are directly linked to corporations that make weapons for the US military industrial complex. The Devos family fortune is heavily tied in with private military contractors employed by the Pentagon to do what was once done by rank-and-file soldiers. Sheldon Adelson is an open, vocal supporter of Netanyahu and the Israeli Likud Party.

Escalating tensions with Iran as much as possible is in the short term economic interest of these pro-Trump capitalists. Furthermore, Trump also received backing from corporations involved in hydraulic fracking, extracting oil and natural gas from shale. These forces desperately need the oil and gas price to remain high, as their continued failure to pay back Wall Street loans is placing the US economy into danger.

However, the contradiction between Trump and the Eastern Establishment amounts to this: Trump’s backers want to make lots of money in the short term from escalating tensions with Iran, but they ultimately don’t have a long term strategy for regime change. The Eastern Establishment does have such a strategy, and favors de-escalating as a means of opening the door to full on counter-revolution.

**Seeking an Iranian Color Revolution**

One section of the recent CFR screed sounds almost like a refutation of Mike Pompeo’s many statements invoking the legacy of Ronald Reagan for current US policy toward Iran. The article says of Reagan’s approach toward the Soviet Union and Iran saying: “He believed that both regimes were unsustainable and that the best way to hasten their demise was through dialogue backed by military strength. His problem, of course, was that Iran had no Mikhail Gorbachev, the reformist premier who became Reagan’s negotiating partner.”

The use of the word “reformist” in this article is no accident. This reveals the lynchpin of the CFR strategy regarding its efforts against Iran. The Eastern Establishment faction of Obama and Clinton sees the Reformist Movement and moderate wing of Iranian leaders as essential to its efforts.

They seek to dismantle Iran in the same way the Soviet Union was dismantled. They seek to build a constituency of sympathizers among the Iranian state apparatus, as well as a movement of “dissident” youth enamored with western capitalism, and create a political crisis. The strategy is to create a “Prague Spring” in Tehran of protesters and chaos. Then in a climatic moment, they will enable a counter-revolutionary undercurrent within the Iranian government or military to seize power.

This is the Color Revolution formula that successfully toppled governments across Eastern Europe, installed the anti-Russian fanatics in Kiev, and overthrew the Islamic Socialist government of Moammar Gaddafi in Libya. It is commonly associated with activist billionaire George Soros and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski.

**Trump Impedes Regime Change Strategy**

However, escalating tensions, as Trump has done, makes this strategy far more difficult. The more that Iranians feel they are being attacked by the United States, the more they will favor hardliners and the less trusting they will be of those “democratic activists” the USA loves to dispatch across the globe.

Furthermore, the more Trump drives the oil price up with increased tension, the more money the state apparatus and Revolutionary Guards will have to fund a hardline message.
Devs, Home Depot, the Fracking Companies and Sheldon Adelson don’t really care about overthrowing the Islamic Republic in the long term. They care about making money selling more weapons, keeping the oil price high, and positioning Netanyahu and his cronies as the dominant faction in Tel-Aviv.

The CFR and Eastern Establishment favors working with Europe to de-escalate tension, slipping American influence into Iran, courting the reformist movement, and eventually fomenting a political crisis. Trump’s current antics are getting in their way, weakening and almost eliminating American influence in Iran, and strengthening the hardline faction.

While Trump screams hatred for the Islamic Republic at the top of his lungs, the forces speaking calmly are the ones strategically plotting to topple the Islamic Republic.

Furthermore, beneath their concerns that Trump is ruining their strategy for an Iranian color revolution, there is also a cold realism. The Islamic Republic of Iran is not like the government of Libya or Iraq. It has a large base of support internationally, and domestically the population is far more loyal and organized.

If Trump’s escalations were to lead to an all out war, not a strategic manipulation, internal collapse and color revolution as the CFR voices favor, there is no guarantee that the United States would win. In fact, much like Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, or the western “Assad Must Go” crusade, it could end up strengthening the global forces of opposition.

_Caleb Maupin is a political analyst and activist based in New York. He studied political science at Baldwin-Wallace College and was inspired and involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement, especially for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”._