



Why Washington Hates Putin: Scott Horton Explains

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): When I first started writing about politics and doing journalism in 2005, one of the main focal points that almost everybody talked about was the influence, the toxic influence of neoconservatives. It was the first part of the George Bush and Dick Cheney administration and neocons like Douglas Feith and people who worked for Dick Cheney were extremely influential in the war in Iraq, the entire war on terror as we came to know it and we thought, a lot of us did, that once George Bush and Dick Cheney were out of office, the discredited neocons would go away and yet they never did. Many of them like Victoria Nuland wormed their way into the Obama administration where she got to work with Hillary Clinton provoking a confrontation with Russia and that went through the Trump administration although Trump ran on a platform, the first president in a while, to try and restore relations with Russia to avoid confrontation with Russia. But then when Joe Biden was elected, people like Victoria Nuland were back in office, the neocons migrated to the Democratic Party and now we have this increasingly dangerous war that is escalating as we speak, to show for it, one that began in 2022, but that the United States played a great role in helping to provoke. And as it turns out the name of our next guest's new book is *Provoke*. He is Scott Horton who is, I think one of the best, if not the single best, critic of neoconservatism over the years, but also American foreign policy and its endless war machine. His book is about specifically the obsession that the United States for whatever reasons had had with Russia, starting a new Cold War with Russia and especially the catastrophe in Ukraine, which is the name of his book. There you see it on the screen. We've talked to Scott before. He's a good friend of the show and we are always happy to have him on. Scott, good evening. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us.

Scott Horton (SH): Happy to be here Glenn. Thank you very much. Of course I've been a big fan of yours since *Unqualified Offerings* back in 2005.

GG: *Unclaimed Territory*, very close though. Yeah, that would have been a good... It's been a long time, believe me. I have trouble remembering the name of that as well. *Unqualified Offerings* would have been good as well though. That would have worked.

SH: I was reading you back then. I remember you... the things Bill Kristol got wrong, way back then.

GG: Exactly. No, the people who were readers of mine pre-Snowden are always the kind of OG readers that I value the most. So I thank you for that as well. Yeah, we've known each other's work for a long time and I'm happy to have you on. Let's begin by talking about this book because honestly, I know I've been focused a lot, as I know you have, on how American media propagandises the citizenry specifically with regard to war and foreign policy. There's a whole apparatus of propagandistic terms and frameworks that our media uses that come from the intelligence agencies to sell new wars to the public and it's very effective. And once the Russian invasion in 2022, the full-scale Russian invasion happened in Ukraine, it was almost mandatory, whenever corporate media outlets described the war, they would say Russia's unprovoked invasion, that was almost the required title, the adjective that had to precede invasion. Unprovoked, unprovoked, unprovoked. And yet obviously the name of your book is *Provoked* in large part because you make the opposite argument. So what was the impetus for writing this book and why is *Provoked* the title?

SH: Well, you know, I had originally given a speech back in 2020 called *The New Cold War with Russia is All America's Fault*. Now it's two years, with the very end of February of 2020 and it was two years before this part of the worst part of the war broke out there. And essentially what I was trying to do, it's the same sort of thing I try to do with my book *Enough Already* about the war on terrorism, is to try to connect the dots and the puzzle pieces all the way back. You know, like if I say to you that America backed Saddam Hussein against Iran in the 1980s, you go, yeah, yeah, I knew that. But what I want to do is I want to be able to connect that all the way through with all the different puzzle pieces leading up to the current situation. And so it's the same kind of thing here where I think this is the advantage that I bring is, or maybe I just hold a childish grudge against George Bush and Bill Clinton and the other George Bush and Barack Obama and at least everybody who worked for Trump, if not him at least on some things and of course Joe Biden and John McCain and Hillary Clinton and they truly did this. And for those of us who are this old and have been watching all along, we've seen it all happen in slow motion. At antiwar.com, of course, we covered the Orange Revolution back in 2004 when America overthrew the government of Ukraine the first time. In fact, they helped rig the election of '94; but the second time. Anyway, and so, but that's the deal, is America has been meddling and as I know that you're very familiar with the fact that America was involved in the Maidan revolution in overthrowing the government in the beginning of 2014, which is what led immediately or virtually immediately to the war in the east of the country that remained what they call sort of low-level fighting for about seven of the eight years there between the wars. And we had peace deals, the Minsk I and Minsk II peace deals, but under American encouragement and protection Kiev refused to ever implement them. And so the war remained on sort of, you know, a slow boil, low boil, but still about 4,000 people killed over the seven years after the first year of the worst fighting of the war. And so it was this massive, you know, unresolved problem of ethnic Russians being killed right on Russia's border there, which even if you want to be a cynic about it, provided a very great excuse for Russia to go ahead and finally

intervene. Although as I pointed out, the thing had been going on for eight years before they finally rolled in the way they did in '22.

GG: So I want to talk about all those individual events. Sorry...

SH: But let me just add...

GG: Sure, go ahead. Sorry.

SH: Yeah, it's okay. It's my fault. I'm a long-winded one. So you have this civil war raging in the east, but then overall you also have this global contest between the United States and Russia over who's going to control all of Russia's so-called near abroad there. And the American doctrine has been to take every bit of this away from them while expanding our military alliance right up into their front porch, as Pat Buchanan put it, right up into their area and truly surrounding them and threatening their country. And so it's not to justify what they've done. Just like my book about Al Qaeda attack in America, is not to justify what they've done, it's to explain why they did what they did and how when the Americans, Washington DC, when our government announces that they're innocent and they had nothing to do with it and all they're doing is defending what's good, true, and beautiful, then based on those lies they write themselves licenced to do worse. As we saw with the terror war, instead of stopping provoking Al Qaeda terrorism, they quadrupled down or worse. And it's the same kind of thing here. Instead of admitting that, gee, we might have pushed our luck a little bit there, maybe we should back off a little bit, they can never admit it. And so they can only double down and double down on their theory of the evil of the other side.

GG: I'm glad you made that distinction between justification and causation because so often people have difficulty distinguishing those two. For example, as you mentioned, if you do say the reason Al Qaeda attacked the United States on 9/11 wasn't because they hate us for our freedom, but because they hated our intervention and constant interference in that region, and people say, oh, so then it was justified? No, you're not commenting on justification. You're just explaining the causation. Kind of like if I say, oh, that person got lung cancer because they smoked three packs of cigarettes a day for 50 years, doesn't mean I'm saying that they deserve it, that lung cancer is good for people who smoke, I'm just observing the causal relationship because that's necessary to understand the situation. So just, it's important to keep in mind that when you say it's provoked, it doesn't mean it's justified. That's a whole separate question. Let me ask you though, this is something I genuinely don't understand, and I'm not asking this rhetorically. I think a lot of people in the United States first started understanding that there was a lot of animosity toward Russia, and a lot of people got convinced to join in with that animosity right around the time of Russiagate, when we were told that the Russians were interfering in our sacred democracy, that they were the reason Hillary Clinton lost and Donald Trump won. The reality is there has been a huge amount of animosity toward Russia in Washington long before that. I think sometimes people will identify the starting point as being in Syria when the CIA was trying to remove Bashar al-Assad and the Russians supported Assad and kind of thwarted the intentions of the CIA there that were fighting along Al Qaeda and ISIS. But even going back way further, you know, the idea of NATO expansion

eastward, something that violates the promise that we made with Gorbachev, started in the Clinton administration, went through the Bush administration, including when Victoria Nuland was the US ambassador to NATO, and then Hillary Clinton's State Department in 2010 openly financed anti-Putin protests, talking about interfering in a country. And then when Hillary Clinton left office and wrote her book, the one thing which she was critical of was that Obama had essentially refused, not entirely, but as much as Washington wanted him to confront Russia by arming Ukraine, something Trump did, but Obama wouldn't, by unleashing the CIA more to remove Assad. It was kind of Hillary Clinton's view, that Russia is the great evil. Long before Russiagate, long before Syria in 2012, what... And then you look at neocons as well, who have long had an obsession with Russia, people like Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan, Victoria Nuland's husband, neocon husband, what explains that? Why is the United States so intent on seeing Russia as an enemy despite overtures from Russia?

SH: Yeah, it's a really great question. I mean, I think, first of all, and you'll find this in the book, which I meant to joke at the beginning, Glenn, I'm so glad that I can prove that I hit the button to publish this book on the 16th. Otherwise, I'd be afraid that you would think that I just transcribed your interview on The Tucker Show the other day and put my name on it and published the thing, because essentially that's what the book is. Glenn Greenwald has been on The Tucker Show the other day, only with 8000 citations. That's basically it. And yes, you're right, you can find a lot of markers. I saw Dave say on the show he thought Syria was a big part of it. I think that's right. John Mearsheimer says it's Crimea. Once they took Crimea, Russia did, the Americans had to come up with an excuse for why that happened. And it couldn't have been because, oops, we just really screwed up and launched this coup and it blew up in our face. So instead they said, oh, Putin wants to rebuild the Soviet Union. He's a psycho. He's Stalin, et cetera, et cetera, Hitler and the rest. So I think that's part of it. But you're right to identify this going back to even earlier. And I think the first time that the Americans, I think truly tried to throw down the gauntlet against Putin would have been Dick Cheney's speech in Vilnius in 2005. What had happened was the Russians started playing hardball on gas transfers across Ukraine. And Ukraine is heavily dependent on those revenues, but they also steal the gas. There's been a lot of controversy since independence of Ukraine from the Soviet Union fighting over payment and theft of gas and this and that. And what the Russians did, Putin decided no one was getting any subsidy on gas anymore except Belarus. Everybody else was going to pay the market price. And Dick Cheney gave a big speech saying that this was extortion and using gas as a weapon and all of these things. That's the first time they really threw down the gauntlet against him. What had really turned them against him before that, I can't really say. I mean, he was the first person to call George W. Bush on September 11th. And he told him, listen, I'm with you. I hate these terrorists as much as you. I'll do anything to help you. You want to invade Afghanistan? You can use my bases in Central Asia that I got left over from the old days, and we'll help you with logistics and intelligence and everything you need for the war. Remember in Afghanistan, we were the ones switching sides in the war, not the Russians. And so he said, we'd be happy to help you with that. And then it was just two months later, three months later, that George W. Bush tore up the anti-ballistic missile treaty, which immediately we know now, but anybody could have guessed then, immediately led to the Russians embarking on a new programme to develop

essentially just more and better missiles to overwhelm our defences. And so it was a terrible move and really a major step back in the Cold War. I mean, when Bill Clinton was expanding NATO, they hated it, but they were essentially trying to just take it on the chin with a smile and turn the other cheek and hope for a better day. You know, Yeltsin had ended up extremely mad at Bill Clinton over the war in Serbia and so forth. But then he was gone within a year and Putin came in and he tried to do a new reset with Colin Powell and George W. Bush. And they just would only ever let it go so far. And I have quote after quote after quote in the book of the various apparatchiks saying essentially, we just don't care about Russia. What are they going to do about it? They're not big enough to worry about. They're too big to be partners with because then they have to try to have a say. So we have to leave them on the outside of all of our structures. But when it comes to their complaints, come on, they're a third rate power. Remember, John McCain said: It's a gas station with H -bombs. They're nothing. This kind of, you know, degradation of their position. So in looking at them from that way, it was essentially not as much just outright anti-Russian animus, it's just a refusal to care about their position or how they might react at all. And then on the question, because you brought up it's important, the Snow Revolution of 2011, as you quite correctly say, Hillary Clinton's State Department, especially through Ambassador Michael McFaul, were encouraging and including with money and the Ngos, the same old NED type scam that they use for the colour-coded revolutions to support dissident groups in Russia. Now, I mean, just think about this on a sheet of paper. This makes no sense to do this. You know, you think you could overthrow the government of Ukraine? I don't know. From the State Department's point of view, okay, take a risk. But you cannot overthrow the Kremlin. You couldn't possibly boost up who?! Nemtsov or any of these guys. There were no dissidents or dissident factions in Russia prepared to take the mantle from Vladimir Putin, who had anything like the popularity or the support or the ability to take over that state. So why come at him like that? Why finance a bunch of protesters when all you're essentially saying is America hates you and you should fear us?! That might as well have been the chant of the slogan of the protesters out in the street. It was absolutely ineffectual, except for anything other than turning Russia against us. And bottom line, their sin is that Putin is a Russian rather than an American patriot, that he refuses to give in to the United States. And the neoconservative doctrine, which the rest of the entire American foreign policy establishment has adopted, is that America must rule the whole world. No one can be independent from us or that's a threat. I mean, think about the way they talk about Cuba and North Korea. They call them a threat. What does that mean? It means they've been able to maintain their independence from us. It's the same reason Iran is a threat. It's the same reason that Russia is a threat, that America no longer completely owns it. Not that they completely owned it in the 90s, they thought they were making great strides in taking over that country or coming to have major influence over its politics, and then when Putin came, he was just too young and too strong, froze them out, froze out the oligarchs, made himself the boss for real in that country in a way that they just cannot abide. And so they're counting the days. I mean, it's amazing to hear them, when they would talk about this guy Navalny, Alexei Navalny, who is a right wing nationalist, who is not a liberal and not a pro-Democrat type at all. And who got what, 20 %?

GG: He talked about Muslims as being vermin and needing to be extinguished. And then he

became the darling of Western liberalism.

SH: And then they talked about him like, oh, man, we could install him in power and it would be great. But this is just crazy. Anyone with a lick of sense could tell you if America really got close to overthrowing the government of the Kremlin and doing some kind of colour coded coup d'etat there, it would lead to war.

GG: Obviously, obviously war is an alternative that people use when they feel that their very existence or their hold on power is being threatened. I mean, the United States, it's like recognising Juan Guaido as the legitimate president of Venezuela, even though he had no very little support among the actual population, like, oh, we're going to put Alexei Navalny as the president of Russia? It's such incredible ignorance.

END

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