

# Clinton's Hawk-in-Waiting

*If Hillary wins the White House, expect Victoria Nuland to be at her side.*

Philip Giraldi, 'The American Conservative' | MAY 19, 2016



*U.S. Embassy, Georgia*

The other day, a question popped up on a Facebook thread I was commenting on: “Where is Victoria Nuland?” The short answer, of course, is that she is still holding down her position as assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs.

But a related question begs for a more expansive response: Where will Victoria Nuland be after January? Nuland is one of Hillary Clinton’s protégés at the State Department, and she is also greatly admired by hardline Republicans. This suggests she would be easily approved by Congress as secretary of state or maybe even national-security adviser—which in turn suggests that her foreign-policy views deserve a closer look.

Nuland comes from what might be called the First Family of Military Interventionists. Her husband, Robert Kagan, is a leading neoconservative who co-founded the Project for the New American Century in 1998 around a demand for “regime change” in Iraq. He is currently a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, an author, and a regular contributor to the op-ed pages of a number of national newspapers. He has already declared that he will be voting for Hillary

Clinton in November, a shift away from the GOP that many have seen as a clever career-enhancing move for both him and his wife.

Robert's brother, Fred, is with the hawkish American Enterprise Institute, and his sister-in-law, Kimberly, is the head of the Institute for the Study of War, which is largely funded by defense contractors. The Kagans work to encourage military action, both through their positions in government and by influencing the public debate through think-tank reports and op-eds. It is a family enterprise that mirrors the military-industrial complex as a whole, with think tanks coming up with reasons to increase military spending and providing "expert" support for the government officials who actually promote and implement the policies. Defense contractors, meanwhile, benefit from the largesse and kick back some money to the think tanks, which then develop new reasons to spend still more on military procurement.

The Kagans' underlying belief is that the United States has both the power and the obligation to replace governments that are considered either uncooperative with Washington (the "Leader of the Free World") or hostile to American interests. American interests are, of course, mutable, and they include values like democracy and the rule of law as well as practical considerations such as economic and political competition. Given the elasticity of the interests, many countries can be and are considered potential targets for Washington's tender ministrations.

For what it's worth, President Obama is reportedly an admirer of Robert Kagan's books, which argue that the U.S. must maintain its military power to accommodate its "global responsibilities." The persistence of neoconservative foreign-policy views in the Obama administration has often been remarked upon, though Democrats and Republicans embrace military interventionism for different reasons. The GOP sees it as an international leadership imperative driven by American "exceptionalism," while the Dems romanticize "liberal intervention" as a sometimes-necessary evil undertaken most often for humanitarian reasons. But the result is the same, as no administration wants to be seen as weak when dealing with the outside world. George W. Bush's catastrophic failures in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to bear fruit under a Democratic administration, while Obama has added a string of additional "boots on the ground" interventions in Libya, Syria, Yemen, the Philippines, and Somalia.

And Nuland herself, many will recall, was the driving force behind efforts to destabilize the Ukrainian government of President Viktor Yanukovich in 2013-14. Yanukovich, admittedly a corrupt autocrat, nevertheless assumed office after a free election. In spite of the fact that Washington and Kiev ostensibly had friendly relations, Nuland provided open support for the Maidan Square demonstrators opposed to Yanukovich's government, passing out cookies to protesters on the square and holding photo ops with a beaming Sen. John McCain.

Nuland started her rapid rise as an adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney. Subsequently, she was serially promoted by secretaries of state Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, attaining her current position in September 2013. But it was her behavior in Ukraine that made her a media figure. It is hard to imagine that any U.S. administration would tolerate a similar attempt by a foreign nation to interfere in domestic politics, particularly if it were backed by a \$5 billion budget, but Washington has long adhered to a double standard when evaluating its own behavior.

Nuland is most famous for using foul language when referring to the potential European role in managing the unrest in Ukraine that she and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) had helped create. She even discussed with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who the new leader of

Ukraine ought to be. “Yats is the guy” she said (referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk), while pondering how she would “glue this thing” as Pyatt simultaneously considered how to “midwife” it. Their insecure phone call was [intercepted and leaked](#), possibly by the Russian intelligence service, though anyone equipped with a scanner could have done the job.

The inevitable replacement of the government in Kiev, actually a coup but sold to the media as a triumph for “democracy,” was only the prelude to a sharp break—and escalating conflict—with Moscow over Russia’s attempts to protect its own interests in Ukraine. The new regime in Kiev, as corrupt as its predecessor and supported by neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists, was consistently whitewashed in the Western media, and the conflict was depicted as “pro-democracy” forces resisting unprovoked “Russian aggression.”

Indeed, the real objective of interfering in Ukraine was, right from the start, to install a regime hostile to Moscow. Carl Gershman, the head of the taxpayer-funded NED, [called Ukraine](#) “the biggest prize” in the effort to topple Russian President Vladimir Putin, who “may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.” But Gershman and Nuland were playing with fire in their assessment, as Russia had vital interests at stake and is the only nation with the military capability to destroy the U.S.

And make no mistake about Nuland’s clear intention to expand the conflict and directly confront Moscow. In Senate testimony in May of 2014, [she noted](#) how the Obama administration was “providing support to other frontline states like Moldova and Georgia.”

Nuland and her neoconservative allies celebrated their “regime change” in Kiev oblivious to the fact that Putin would recognize the strategic threat to his own country and would react, particularly to protect the historic Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea. Barack Obama responded predictably, initiating what soon became something like a new Cold War against Russia, risking escalation into a possible nuclear confrontation. It was a crisis that would not have existed but for Nuland and her allies.

Though there was no evidence that Putin had initiated the Ukraine crisis and much evidence to the contrary, the U.S. government propaganda machine rolled into action, claiming that Russia’s measures in Ukraine would be the first step in an invasion of Eastern Europe. Former Secretary of State Clinton dutifully [compared Putin](#) to Adolf Hitler. And Robert Kagan provided the argument for more intervention, producing a lengthy essay in *The New Republic* entitled “[Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire](#),” in which he criticized President Obama for failing to maintain American dominance in the world. The *New York Times* [revealed](#) that the essay was apparently part of a joint project in which Nuland regularly edited her husband’s articles, even though this particular piece attacked the administration she worked for.

As the situation in Ukraine continued to deteriorate in 2014, Nuland exerted herself to scuttle several European attempts to arrange a ceasefire. When NATO Commander Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove was cited as being in favor of sending more weapons to the Ukrainian government to “raise the battlefield cost for Putin,” Nuland [commented](#), “I’d strongly urge you to use the phrase ‘defensive systems’ that we would deliver to oppose Putin’s ‘offensive systems.’”

To return to the initial question of where Victoria Nuland is, the long answer would be that while she is not much in the news, she is continuing to provide support for policies that the White

House apparently approves of. Late last month, she was again in Kiev. She criticized Russia for its lack of press freedom and its “puppets” in the Donbas region while telling a Ukrainian audience about a “strong U.S. commitment to stand with Ukraine as it stays on the path of a clean, democratic, European future. ... We remain committed to retaining sanctions that apply to the situation in Crimea until Crimea is returned to Ukraine.” Before that, she was in Cyprus and France discussing “a range of regional and global issues with senior government officials.”

But one has to suspect that, at this point, she is mainly waiting to see what happens in November. And wondering where she might be going in January.

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